

DEFINITION 3

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DEFINITION 3

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*The still on the front cover is from
the Japanese 'No Greater Love'.
The film tells the story of a Japan-
ese opponent of the second world
war. Writing of his intentions in
making the film, the director Ma-
saki Kobayashi said 'The picture
was not produced merely to reveal
the crimes committed during the
war but to portray how extra-
ordinary circumstances can change
human society into an inhuman
organism.'
The British censor has demanded
such large cuts in the film that so
far it has not had a public showing
in this country.*

Triumph of the Will



EDITORIAL

It will be seen that the present issue of *Definition* contains three articles on the subject of film criticism. Miss Penelope Houston's Open Letter is a reply to Alan Sowell's comments on *Sight & Sound* ('The Best We've Got'—*Definition* 2), and constitutes an addendum to her exposition of the general approach in 'The Critical Question' (*Sight & Sound*, Autumn 1960). Paddy Whannel, whose position coincides with our own, contributes 'Receiving the Message', in which he discusses various interpretations which have been placed upon the term 'commitment'. The third article, by Robin Wood, requires a little more explanation, as it embodies a bitter attack upon our own ideals. We are printing it because, whilst its attacks are based as we hope to show—upon complete misunderstanding, it seems to us to contain in its positive passages a summary of all that is really valuable in the 'right wing' attitude represented in this country mainly by *Oxford Opinion*.

Three elements can be distinguished in the work of the *Oxford Opinion* writers: firstly their stated principles, which we believe to be based upon a misconception of the nature of critical response, and hence to be pragmatically useless; secondly the critical method *vis-à-vis* the individual film, in which we find that is worthwhile; and thirdly the quality of their final judgments,

which combines a vague immaturity of values with the vitiating consequences of their initial theory. Briefly, then, what we accept is their insistence upon the analysis of film in terms of its cinematic rather than its purely literary content. And this is the theme of Mr. Wood's article.

The discussion over criticism has become messy and confused. In an attempt to clarify it, let us begin by considering the principles held to be self-evident by those who disagree with us. Miss Houston, in 'The Critical Question', states her axioms with a characteristic air of self-effacing irony; but as she nowhere disavows them, and as the bulk of her arguments are consistent with them, we must assume that they were meant to be taken seriously:

"The aspiring critic naïve enough to ask advice is likely to be given it succinctly. His job: to make up his mind about what the artist was trying to do; then to consider how well he has done it. The third question is the dangerous one: was it really worth doing in the first place?"

Mr. Ian Jarvie, speaking for the Right in *Film* 25, is less concerned with exploring the private recesses of the artist's intentions; but otherwise he offers a set of rules which do not differ substantially from those quoted above:

"As I see it, a critic's first job is to ask what problem the images and noises 'up there on the screen' are intended to solve. Every genuinely personal film can be read as it's creator's solution to a cinematic *problem*."

"With the first stage over... a second stage is reached. This consists in seeing how well the artist has solved the problems he has posed himself..."

"Next and last the critic can evaluate the ends."

This division of criticism into three vital questions was proposed some ten years ago by Mr. Ernest Lindgren in a series of lectures on critical procedure; and it turns up again in the November 1960 issue of *Granta*, where Mr. Charles Barr, attempting to strike a position of tolerant neutrality between the warring camps, says:

"The critic's function is three-fold: to understand the work, to interpret its meaning for his readers, and then to pass an aesthetic and—if he feels impelled to—a moral judgment on it."

Finally, out of thirteen critics who wrote about their own work in a recent series of articles in *Films & Filming*, only three discussed basic principles: but these three (Jympson Harman, Forsyth Hardy and Dick Richards) all claimed adherence to the same regimen.

Thus liberals and Right, along with practically everyone else, are in agreement upon fundamentals; and their only differences are upon points of detail. While Mr. Jarvie states categorically that the second question — that of how well a thing is done — 'is by far the most important part of criticism', Miss Houston concedes that 'art has an inescapable relationship to politics', and appears to accept that the 'dangerous third question' cannot be evaded. Further, both liberals and Right believe that 'commitment' is tied up with this third question: but whilst Miss Houston approves of commitment in moderation, and merely reproaches the Left for being concerned with their own commitments to the exclusion of all others, Mr. Ian Cameron — being perhaps more consistent — disapproves of it flatly. In *Oxford Opinion* No. 40 he writes:

"In evaluating a film, we maintain that the only valid criteria are aesthetic. To judge a film by its content is to set the critic's own views up against those of the director . . . ;"

and this, he maintains elsewhere, is 'a gross impertinence'. (It is apparently not impertinent for the critic to set his *aesthetic* up against the director's. But we'll let that pass.)

The writers of both *Sight & Sound* and *Oxford Opinion* are prepared to deny that the form and content of a film can be rigidly separated — the former by repeated implication in their attacks upon the Right, and the latter explicitly in a joint letter to *The Observer* (Nov. 27th, 1960). Ian Cameron can even complain, in the same paragraph as our last quotation, that he and his colleagues have been falsely accused of an exclusive concern with style. Yet how do they reconcile this with their acceptance of the 'three questions' doctrine of criticism? If form and content are indivisible, then how can *what* is said be distinguished from the *way* it is said, and the one appraised against the other? And as for the director's intentions, what evidence have we for these beyond what he has actually done?

A final note of lunacy is added to the discussion by the persistent sug-

gestion, both in print and in private correspondence, that it is we of the Left who are responsible for the attempt to split form and content into airtight departments. We are accused of saying that content is 'more important' than form. (And charges of this sort are made with particular energy by Robin Wood.) Yet the simple truth is that if form and content *were* divisible the question of commitment would not arise. The message of a film, once separated out from the manner of its statement, could be judged as in a Court of Law, embraced or spurned for its moral stature, or submitted to the test of prediction for its truth or falsehood. One could say with Miss Houston, "The critic does not have to agree with a case to know whether it is being well or badly stated;" or with Mr. Cameron, "Fuller is at his best . . . when his ideas are at their least inspired;" but commitment would be a superfluous concept.

Let us make it clear, once and for all, that we reject absolutely the 'three questions' theory of criticism. Form is the expression of content, or it is nothing. And since *what* is expressed cannot be isolated and held for comparison against *how* it is expressed, it follows that the *value* of what is expressed is not something that can be dealt with afterwards, take it or leave it, by a routine auditing of the moral accounts. The content of a film is not a transcendental idea waiting to be clothed in form, well or badly, arbitrarily and at the director's discretion. It is rather that intersection of attitudes and values from the standpoint of which the work falls into perspective as a meaningful whole. Some films will reveal different meanings, with a greater or lesser degree of conviction, to different critics; and others will collapse into incoherence for the critic who cannot look from the standpoint of the attitudes which they reflect. Our values are thus engaged not merely in some act of assessment subsequent to interpretation, but in the very fabric of our immediate response. The only questions we can ask of a film are: "What does it say to me?" and, "How important do I find it?" To extend one of Paddy Whannel's examples: the Fascist

who responds positively to *Triumph of the Will* is not responding to its 'vulgarity and bombast', but is seeing these qualities as something other.

It is wrong to suppose that the Left critics wish to drag wage claims into every review, or that we find merit only in films dealing with problems of exploitation or injustice. The connection with politics arises from Lindsay Anderson's original articles where, addressing himself implicitly to Socialists, he exhorted us not to give way to sophistication but to make sure that our criticisms reflected, and hence helped to propagate, those same values as lay at the heart of our political convictions. This was an appeal to principle, and formed part of the New Left's rediscovery that Socialism was not just an economic theory but first and foremost, an attitude towards life and towards one's fellow men. We have no patent rights in commitment. Indeed, one would have expected others whose views rest upon moral principle — Christians, for example — to be attracted by it. But perhaps the notions of absolute morality involved in religious faith rob commitment of its urgency. At all events, only Socialists appear to have taken up Mr. Anderson's challenge. As for *Sight & Sound*, the 'inescapable relationship' which Miss Houston sees between art and politics is exemplified in her remark, "Anyone who feels that it (*Triumph of the Will*) should be reviewed *primarily* in terms of its technique rather than for its unique value as a document of Nazism triumphant has somehow failed to establish contact with the century in which he is living." This should suffice to illustrate the difference between her 'commitment' and ours. She sees it simply as a matter of political *relevance*.

However, if we are to talk about films, and not just about the subjective values which they represent to us, then we require some theory of the structure of film art which will enable us to interpret the one in terms of the other. Here again Miss Houston has misunderstood our position: and her remarks about 'pulling down an aesthetic out of the clouds' (as opposed to relying

upon one's own sensibility and knowledge) serve only to confuse a very straightforward issue. What we understand by a 'theory' is not a sort of electronic computer which will automatically dish out value judgments provided a correctly coded critical analysis has been fed in at the other end, but simply a clearer conception of the way in which our critical responses are related to the basic mechanisms of the medium. Our article 'Towards a Theory' (Definition No. 1) has aroused little interest; but we still feel that its proposal of a dialectical and poetic aesthetic for the cinema — the 'emergence' of values from the juxtaposition of aspects of reality — contains the germs of a more general and hence more rewarding theory. Can does the *Oxford Opinion* concern with the minutiae of camera-work.

The source of the chaos of the Right should by now be evident: despite all their talk about purely cinematic style, their chosen aesthetic is completely at variance with the actual structures of film expression. Thus in *Oxford Opinion* No. 41 Mr. Gary Broughton can rail against the unoriginality of the plot of *Pickpocket*, and can condemn Bresson's handling of objects and actors for failing to measure up to the meaning he wishes to convey. But where does Mr. Broughton look for Bresson's meaning? Why, in his written commentaries upon his own work! Carrying the 'three questions' doctrine to its logical conclusion, Mr. Broughton judges the achievement of a film against intentions expressed abstractly and in a totally different form of communication: and in doing so he overlooks those merits — albeit slight ones — which *Pickpocket* does possess despite its retentiveness of dialogue and absurdity of plot. His critical method is therefore purely literary. That is to say, it is a method appropriate to the evaluation of prose — a medium in which differing forms can be used to convey substantially identical content.

The basic dilemma of these writers is nicely revealed, in a couple of sentences, in Ian Cameron's review of *Eyes without a Face* (Film 26). He says:

"The beauty of the images lies in the way in which they express the director's vision. Beauty is something meaningful and not just an optional extra for a few greenery-yallery critics;"

and this is almost true. But the crucial fact about beauty is that it is an experience, and not, as is suggested by popular usage, an attribute of the inanimate. In other words, beauty is a quality not of the object but of our response to it; and in this response, which is an affirmation made in sympathy with the work in question, our values are inevitably engaged. Only in a period of classicism — i.e. in the culture of an established élite — can content be disregarded (or rather, taken for granted) and art judged purely by technical criteria. The music of Wagner, the sculpture of Epstein and the poetry of Pound were all attacked on formal grounds by those who could not share their affirmations; and Tolstoy wrote a persuasive article 'proving' that *King Lear* was no good. No-one can actually disprove Tolstoy, even on technicalities. It is simply that he was out of sympathy with Shakespeare's view of man.

But let us consider an example from the realm of cinema. *I Aim at the Stars* contains a remarkable use of a cinematic device with a pedigree stretching back to Eisenstein. In the lengthy count-down for the launching of von Braun's first U.S. satellite, which occurs towards the close of the film, each screen second is extended to occupy about two-and-a-half seconds of actual time. This is of course very clever. But whether it succeeds in building up tension, or appears merely inflated, rhetorical and burdensome, will depend largely upon what we have been led to stake, in the course of the film, upon the final outcome of von Braun's crowning project. Its aesthetic success or failure will be an expression of our moral orientation at that point in the narrative.

Mr. Cameron's article on *Eyes without a Face* is intelligent and perceptive; yet having read it, one cannot help feeling that something vital has been overlooked. The only interpretation he permits himself is that Franju is 'concerned' with the

role of the victim. And this doesn't really get you very far. What significance does Franju find in the victim's situation? And in relation to what forces is he seen? Having affected a detachment from any moral or social standpoint, the *Oxford Opinion* writers have been forced to adopt a 'purely aesthetic' approach: but since they are forbidden to concern themselves with those 'meanings' a response to which is integral to the experience of beauty, they are left with no choice but to judge a film's technique against unspecified but nonetheless *a priori* conceptions of what true cinema should be like. This represents their criticism at its best. At its worst it degenerates into shameless gush about actors' performances and composition for the cinemascope screen. They gravitate towards a position wherein the criterion of a film's merit is the number of things that can be said about it.

The critics of the Right find themselves trapped between their genuine enthusiasm for the cinema and their adherence to an aesthetic which is firmly literary in its implications. But there is nothing fortuitous about this: for if these writers were to sever their ties with the 'three questions' doctrine, they would find themselves abandoned upon the wild sea of relative values where each man must be his own navigator. And this is a responsibility which they have shown every inclination not to face.

None of this means that we are gaily satisfied with the standard of critical writing built up (over a span of precisely three harassed issues) in the pages of *Definition*. But we should like to make one observation in fairness both to ourselves and to *Sight & Sound*. A writer who does not elaborate upon details of camera movement or of composition is not necessarily producing judgments which could have been arrived at equally well by a glance at the script. He is writing about the experience which came across to him in the cinema; and if he appears to neglect significant points of technique it is often because he has assumed them in his account of the film's statement. (And of course, many films are no more than

charades illustrating a plot-synopsis.) Nevertheless, in view of the prevailing muddle and the controversy over basic procedure, it would perhaps be as well if for a while we all attempted to write X-ray criticism—criticism in which the structure and articulations are clearly shown.

A final point remains to be made about commitment; but it is an all-important one. We have tended to speak as if the meaning of a work were *determined* by the values we bring to bear upon it. This is not strictly so. A radical function of all art is to face man with his freedom. This is perhaps seen most strikingly in music. Here, in an art

which is form without substance, we often feel that the patterns of sound are mirroring those of argument, of mathematics or of abstract design. No sane person would look for a key to such correspondences: but it seems likely that the elation which great music engenders in us is less a matter of the music 'expressing' emotions' (does anyone really listen to a symphony to hear "an adagio of tranquillity rippled by uneasiness, followed by a brief allegretto passage of muted triumph..." etc?) than the primitive excitement of exercising our freedom in exploring the intricacies of *possible* thought.

The difference with the cinema is

that it is *about* something; and responses to it cannot be dissociated from our responses to life. Yet the fact remains that each film is an appeal to us to make a fresh choice of our Selves by engaging with it in its affirmation. Art is the digested and ordered experience of other men, and supplies structures in relation to which our own attitudes can be formed more rapidly than in the lengthy processes of personal encounter; and every work to which we respond calls forth a modification, clarification or replenishment of our values. Few films bring about anything of the magnitude of religious conversion. But we never leave the cinema unchanged.

The Grapes of Wrath



ENTHUSIASM, FOR WHAT?

THE BEST WE'VE GOT —

Dear Alan Lovell:

Under this title, in *Definition's* last issue, you fired off a salvo of complaints against *Sight and Sound*. "The people who seem closest to us are often our greatest enemies," you sighed; and the tone of your article indicated that you found *Sight and Sound* guilty of some sort of betrayal. But betrayal, I'm left wondering, of what? The *Sequence* tradition . . . but *Sequence*, for all its energy, was not exactly "committed" in the sense *Definition* is trying to be. "Enthusiasm" . . . but enthusiasm for what? In paragraph two of your article, it is enthusiasm that *Sight and Sound* lacks, and in paragraph nine "exaggerated enthusiasm" is the charge made against one of its reviews. Aren't you perhaps being a little disingenuous, and shouldn't you rather have made it clear that we don't always share the same enthusiasms?

Being fully conscious of our own limitations, and those of critical writing in general, we had hoped your article might have given us rather more to chew on. Of course there isn't enough cogent, stimulating, analytical writing around. But there are problems . . . Three times recently we have commissioned major articles, on major themes, from writers of whom you would thoroughly approve; and

three times, in spite of urgent encouragement from this office, the writers have backed down and failed to deliver copy. One ought to remember that there has been a good deal more talk about commitment than first-rate examples of commitment in action. And the most one can do is endeavour to encourage this kind of article.

Your comments, however, concentrated mainly on specific points. And, as I've recently tried to define my own attitude on some of the larger questions (*Sight and Sound*, Autumn, 1960), I'm limiting myself here to answering some of these points. To answer all of them would only be a tedious waste of everyone's time, but I have tried to cover the major ones.

1. "Nearly all (feature articles) are compilation articles." Factually, of course, this is untrue, even though you manage rather oddly to include Lindsay Anderson's piece on two Japanese films among your compilations". But the assumption is that articles of this kind are published as a way of dodging more detailed criticism. This is sometimes true: there are obviously trends in cinema which should be examined, but are reflected in films which don't in themselves demand detailed analysis. Would you disagree with this?

On the other hand, a good many of these articles come from overseas; and they reflect our view that the time to report on a new development in a foreign industry is while it is happening. It would be easier, certainly, to wait until we have all had a chance to see the films. But would we get this chance if magazines like *Sight and Sound* did not try to stimulate interest (and enthusiasm) at the moment when it counts? *Shadows*, for instance, was first mentioned in one of these articles; was brought to the National Film Theatre as a result of the interest aroused; and then reached the commercial cinema. This has happened in other cases: offhand, I'd quote *Pather Panchali*, *A Generation* and *On the Bowery* as similar examples. Inevitably these compilation articles present problems. Many of them come from abroad, which imposes the double difficulty of writing for a foreign readership and knowing that translation will impose a further barrier between author and reader. But we believe a magazine calling itself "international" ought to follow a wide-ranging policy.

2. "The choice of subject is always obvious in *Sight and Sound*" . . . Always? Or most of the time, or sometimes, or occasionally? Or obvious in retrospect, which is something else again . . . You talk of "fashionable minds", but aren't you forgetting that it's partly magazines like our own which help to create fashions. And isn't this puritanical mistrust of "fashion" in itself a bit inhibiting?

3. "Nowhere in *Sight and Sound* has there been any kind of critical consideration of *Hiroshima mon Amour*." Again, you've preferred the sweeping statement to literal fact; but I know what you mean—*Sight and Sound* did not review *Hiroshima*. The reason was one of timing: briefly, that we were not in a position to review the film until three months after its London opening, and that we felt a different kind of coverage had sufficiently indicated our high opinion of it. Perhaps we were at fault; perhaps, given the same circumstances, we would do the same again.

4. The publication of a shot by shot sequence from *Look Back in An-*

ger. You find that we did this some while back with *Tokyo Story*, leap from this to the deduction that we consider both films of equal merit, and from this to the comment that "to try to compare the two films makes criticism into some kind of joke." But the comparison is all your own, arrived at through the time-honoured but surely not very reputable process of establishing guilt by association. We also ran a script sequence from a comedy called *The Marrying Kind*, and perhaps I ought to confirm that we don't think this as important as *Tokyo Story* either.

5. You complain of a "lack of any serious concern with the economics of the industry," though you exempt Walter Lassally's recent article from this charge. There's some easy invective in your sentence about a magazine's function being "to expose this corrupt and hypocritical system" (i.e., the workings of the industry). But I would rather say that the duty of a responsible magazine is to look at the industry and its problems as they are, and to put forward suggestions within the context of what might actually be achieved. For instance, the suggestion we have made that something comparable to the French system of rewarding "quality" might be extended to our own industry.

6. Finally, you criticise an article I wrote a year ago, in which I tried to make a distinction between 'private' and 'public' films. Apparently I didn't make the meaning clear, and I'm glad of the opportunity to try to elucidate it. The point, briefly, was this: a film like *Shadows* (to take one example) is concerned with race relations; it could be argued that it's one of the best comments on the subject the screen has given us. But it is *not* about race relations in the way that, say, *Intruder in the Dust* was, or in the way that *Bicycle Thieves* is 'about' poverty or *Grapes of Wrath* 'about' the Dust Bowl. Its voice, that is, seems to me by comparison a private one—though, paradoxically, it can come through just as loudly. It leaves us to draw our own conclusions; as, in the past, novels have been more apt to do than films. It does not state an argument, but

finds its argument through examining a small area of experience. The "big issues" are present (of course and essentially) but they are being approached rather more obliquely. I find this a new trend in film-making, and on reflection you might conceivably agree.

This whole critical debate ought to carry us forward, and I hope *Definition* manages to clarify its own point of view in later issues. At present, it seems to me a little rocky on its feet. Here, for instance, you gibe at *Sight and Sound* for giving review space to "a typical Hollywood product"; and there *Definition* finds room to give a page to the "typical" *Can Can*. Your editorial welcomes *The Entertainer*; but I could no doubt borrow your own peremptory italics to point out that "nowhere has there been any kind of critical consideration of *The Entertainer*." And so on. No doubt you have good reasons, and in any case I can't feel much enthusiasm for playing tit for tat. It would be a pity if a debate which ought to lead to better, firmer, and more invigorating writing should fall aimlessly away into a round game of magazines taking in each other's critical washing.

Yours sincerely,

Penelope Houston
Editor, *Sight and Sound*.

NEW CRITICISM?

One is relieved to find, at long last, some vague stirrings of unrest in British film criticism: "Sight and Sound" attacks "Cahiers du Cinema," "Definition" attacks "Sight and Sound," etc.; one still awaits some recognition from somewhere that we still have very little idea of what cinema rightly is, and even less as to how to analyse and evaluate individual films. British critics, in fact—and the tendency is if anything more chronic in "Definition" than in "Sight and Sound"—very seldom review *films*: they merely review their scenarios and their scripts. Examples? A review of "Can-Can" that doesn't deign to reveal the director's name, and indeed shows little awareness that the film *had* one; a piece on "The Wild One" that doesn't once mention Benedek, or make any attempt to *place* the film in his development, such as it is (does Mr. Prince know, one is left wondering, what other films he has made?); Mr. Lovell's piece on "Hiroshima, Mon Amour" ("...nowhere in 'Sight and Sound' has there been any kind of critical consideration of the film"—Mr. Lovell), concerned almost exclusively with the Duras script, which he analyses by lifting a few phrases out of their context and seriously misquoting the ending, thereby revealing an almost total lack of comprehension of what the script,

even, is about: he doesn't attempt to analyse the *film*, interpret its many difficulties and ambiguities, or shed any light on Resnais' outlook on life or the characteristics of the *mise-en-scène* (which is, of course, the same thing). One is concerned, indeed, about the "new" criticism "Definition" proposes to offer: it seems suspiciously like the old, in all essentials.

How does one set about judging a film? The notion of "commitment" has proved much too vague and theoretical to provide any sort of answer in itself; in practice it has led to enormities like the review of "On the Beach" that appeared in the *Universities & Left Review*. In fact, the principle of commitment in film criticism has mostly intensified the muddle, encouraging our critics more than ever to look at what they call the film's subject (meaning the subject of its scenario) rather than at the film. I haven't yet found a "committed" critic who was able to say (for example) that "Kanal" is a very bad film.

Controversy rages (if, in a country where "Sight and Sound" is still the leading critical smoulder, "rages" is the right word) at present over the question of Form versus Content: for all the world as if the question existed. Miss Penelope Houston, for example:

"The belief—more often it looks like a pretence—that one can somehow write a sounder review of a film by keeping to style and method, by not bothering to work out what its motive force may be, is surprisingly influential."

The Voice of Sweet Reasonableness, polite, prim, and slightly bored. And whom, dear Penelope, has it influenced? Certainly no such decadent doctrine has corrupted those whose work is permitted to appear on the chaste pages of "Sight and Sound." Where do you look for a film's "motive force?" Under the bonnet? Don't burn your fingers, the engine may be hot! A work of art isn't a car, and you won't find its motive force by looking anywhere except where it is displayed to view: in its style and method. The content of a book isn't a synopsis of its plot. Its content is the words of which it is composed; change them, and you have not only changed the style, but changed the content.

And how much less is a film a synopsis of its plot, or its author's noble intentions! The content of a film is moving images, words and sounds, fused into a unity. The despised French, who are "no more than restating the old doctrine of 'art for art's sake'" (Mr. Lovell) realised this years ago. We go on blindly asserting the contrary, by implication if not overtly. Give the vast majority of English critics a copy of the script, or even a plot-synopsis, and send them off to read it and write their review: the result won't differ in any essential from their review after seeing the film. Indeed, they are in the wrong profession: their interest, such as it is, is in literature. They should be book critics or drama critics, and leave the film alone.

A work of art is one only in so far as it is the product and the manifestation of one creative intelligence: if the cinema is an art at all it is a director's art. I firmly believe that to a truly committed critic who understands the art he professes to serve, "Touch of Evil," "Rear Window" and "Rio Bravo" must seem immeasurably superior to

to "Room at the Top," "Ashes and Diamonds" or "On the Beach." And superior not on any grounds of "mere" technique (technique is often "mere" in England, which shows how little we understand the meaning of the word), but on grounds of content. I am talking, let us be clear, not of the content of the script, but of that of the film. Wajda's or Kramer's technique (one can't say the same for Clayton) is obviously quite adequate to express their particular sensibilities: one doesn't dislike their films on any "merely" technical grounds. If the sensibility becomes more refined, the technique will develop to match it.

All of which brings me to what Mr. Richard Roud in the current issue of "Sight and Sound" refers to as "this mysterious, elusive mise-en-scène." ("The only way to keep things as much like they always have been as possible, is to make any alternative too much for your poor tiny brain to grasp"—Jimmy Porter, cribbing from George Orwell.) "It might be a good idea," Mr. Roud, with becoming lack of insistence, proposes, "to attempt to define that untranslatable term." Whereupon he proceeds to attempt not to, with fair success. Let us attempt it for him.

A director is about to make a film. He has before him a script, camera, lights, décor, actors. What he does with them is mise-en-scène, and it is precisely here that the artistic significance of the film, if any, lies. The director's business is to get the actors (with their co-operation and advice) to move, speak, gesture, register expressions in a certain manner, with certain inflections, at a certain tempo: whether he uses the actors to fulfil precisely a preconceived vision (one thinks of Hitchcock) or releases their ability to express *themselves* and creates through them (one thinks of Renoir) is a matter for the individual genius. It is his business to place the actors significantly within the décor, so that décor itself becomes an actor; with the advice and co-operation of the cameraman, to compose and frame the shots; to regulate the tempo and rhythm

of movement within the frame and of the movement of the camera; to determine the lighting of the scene. In all this, the director's decision is final. All this is mise-en-scène. And much more, for we have so far considered only one shot. The movement of the film from shot to shot, the relation of one shot to the other shots, already taken or not, which will make up the finished film, cutting, montage, this is mise-en-scène. And still more. For mise-en-scène is not these things considered as separate and detachable items: it is all that fuses all these into one organic unity, and consequently more much more, than the sum of its parts. The tone and atmosphere of the film, visual metaphor, the establishment of relationships between characters, the relation of all parts to the whole: all this is the creation of the mise-en-scène. It is this final consideration of the quality that fuses all the parts into a unity that led Astruc to define mise-en-scène as "a certain way of extending the élans of the soul in the movement of the body: a song, a rhythm, a dance." It is this that makes film, as an art, so much closer to music than to literature. One can sum up by defining mise-en-scène with Doniol-Valcroze, quite simply as "the organisation of time and space."

If we are interested in the novel as an art, we read "The Rainbow" to make contact with Lawrence's way of looking at life, to analyse it, assess it and assimilate it. If we are interested in the film as an art, we see "Rio Bravo," "Rear Window" or "Touch of Evil" to make contact with Hawks', or Hitchcock's, or Welles' way of looking at life. Where can we find it but in the mise-en-scène? It is here that the content of the film lies: this is what the critic must try to analyse. No English critic, as far as I am aware, has written of any of the films anything that could be dignified with the name of review. The "committed" critic is so preoccupied with the superficialities of "subject" that he habitually fails to be aware of Hawk's generous, positive humanism, the profound sense of social responsibility inculcated

Almost any of Hitchcock's films, the probing into the sources of corruption offered by the recent Welles. Far from presupposing a theory of "art for art's sake," an analysis of mise-en-scène is the only valid way of assessing a film's significance in relation to life, the moral and spiritual values it embodies. Of course, if we regard "Rio Bravo" as words on paper, as plot and dialogue merely, we shall see little beyond a well-constructed cowboy yarn. Analyse the film, and you discover a profound sense of complex moral values, you find yourself analysing a powerful, supremely balanced, objective empirical intelligence. Conversely, analyse the mise-en-scène of "Kanal" or "Ashes and Diamonds," and you find an embarrassing and hysterical exhibitionism, a sick sadism passing itself off as impassioned protest. Wajda's films are always most vivid when a man is meeting a violent death), a total inability to convincingly depict a sexual relationship or to understand a female character.

We urgently need a sharpening of critical instruments, some means of analysing what Dr. F. R. Leavis would call "local life," some method of practical criticism of mise-en-scène. It is frightfully difficult: rather like trying to analyse a symphony without the help of a score, without being able to quote the notes (the only possible form of quotation, a still, is a pitifully inadequate substitute). So much easier to talk about the script. Hence Mr. Lovell's complete failure to analyse Resnais' film for us. And of course the script matters. But its importance is entirely relative—it is of importance only with reference to the mise-en-scène, very much as the libretto of "The Magic Flute" or "Rigoletto" is only of importance with reference to Mozart and Verdi. It is permissible to write, "In 'The Rake's Progress' Stravinsky is let down by his librettists at the end of Act 2"; and it is permissible to write, "At certain crucial points in 'Home

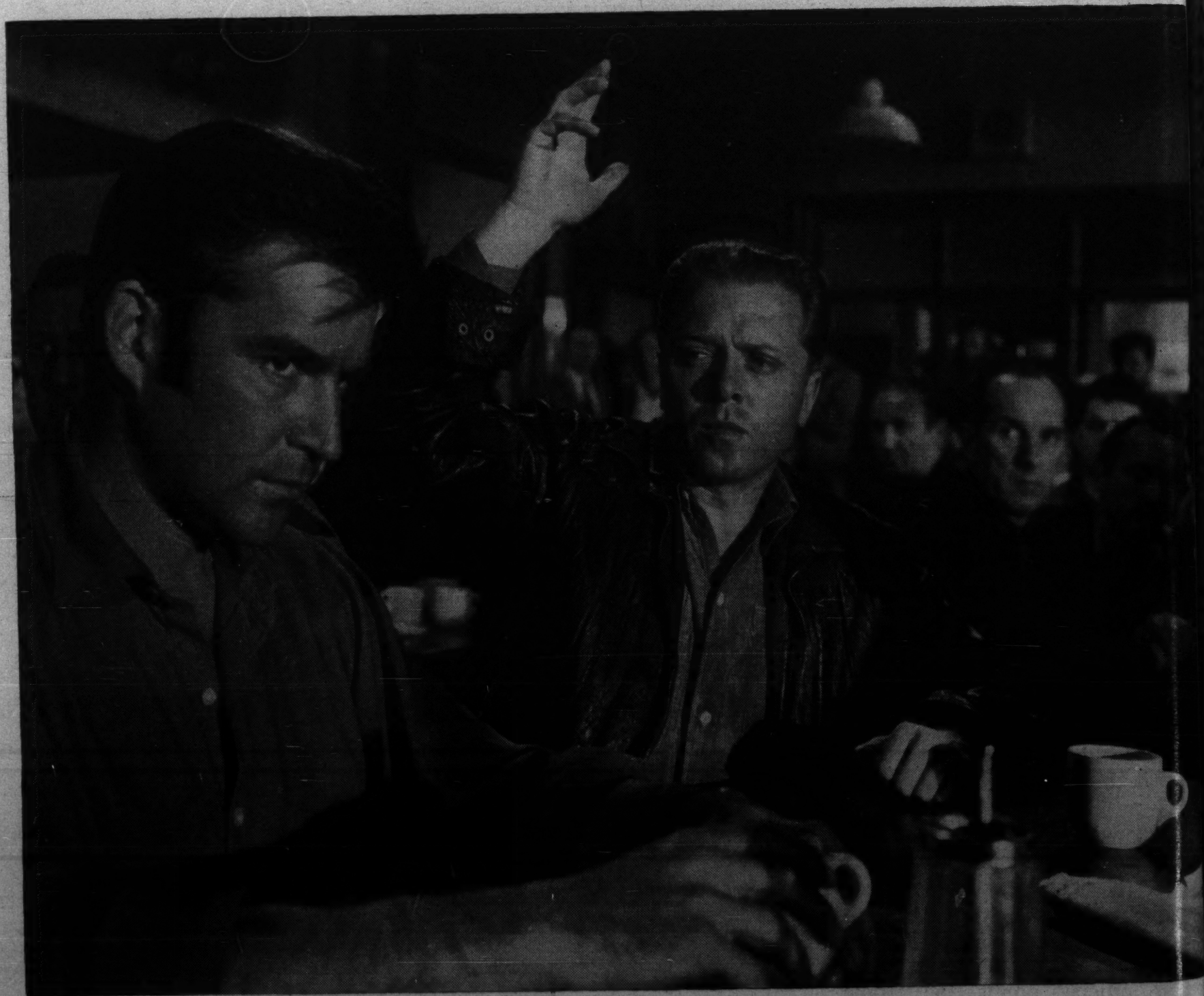
from the Hill', Minnelli is let down by his scenarist." The fact remains that anyone undertaking to discuss either of these works is still committed to analysing the music and the mise-en-scène respectively. In the case of Minnelli's very interesting film, who has done it? What English critic has attempted to define Minnelli's very complex (and perhaps unsatisfactory) attitude to the American Way of Life? Of course, such an undertaking would entail a lot of serious work and study. So much easier to shrug it all off with a sneer about "florid family saga" ("Sight and Sound") and leave it at that, as if one were reviewing the novel on which the film is based.

We shall only be able to begin to solve the problems confronting the serious film critic when we are properly aware of the difficulties involved. As a preliminary, we must grasp that in film as in any other art there can be no question of discussing content as if it were separable from form, method, style, and that the only means we have of analysing a film is through its mise-en-scène, which is to say its technique. One cannot discuss "Psycho," for example, without discussing the significance of the insistent forward tracking shots taking us always further *inside* or into darkness, the cut from the close-up of the water and blood spiralling down the dark deep hole of the drain to the close-up of the murdered girl's eye with the camera spiralling out from it, certain striking physical resemblances between actors (Hitchcock always chooses his players carefully), the whole complicated concept of seeing and not seeing, being seen and not being seen (in a moral and metaphysical, as well as physical, sense) embodied in the extraordinarily expressive use of eyes throughout the film. One must be able, Mr. Lovell, to analyse and understand these things before one has the right to dismiss Hitchcock as a "second-rate director."

Robin Wood

RECEIVING THE MESSAGE

The angry silence



There has been almost wilful misunderstanding of what is involved in the idea of 'committed criticism'. The charge is that politics are being brought into art.

T. C. Worsley wrote about 'argument conducted by police dogs or unilateral decision by Central Committees' (*Encore* Jan.-Feb. 1958). Later he wrote 'I belong to the generation which thoroughly enjoys good play. I make this damaging admission in the full awareness that it puts me out of court with all those who take their theatre with proper seriousness' (*New Statesman* 26 July 1958).

In the *Observer*, John Wain criticised those who believe that good work can come from blending 'left-wing sentiments, topical references and a shaggy rhetorical surface'. 'Good theatre is not made out of propaganda' wrote John Raymond (*New Statesman* 19 Jan. 1957). Doing a criticism of critics in *Encore* (Nov.-Dec. 1959), Penelope Gilliat wrote 'What we really imply by commitment of course, in our sly subjective way, is commitment to our side, we want allies, flagwavers and objection-waivers...'

What has emerged is a myth of commitment, a caricature of a critic who demands films about workers to be understood by workers. Films on contemporary themes and social problems. Realistic films. Films tackling big subjects and packed with left-wing messages. Having created this largely imaginary figure it is easy to denounce him. It is worth looking more closely at these fallacies and trying to dispose of them.

The Proletarian Fallacy

Films should be about the working class

Now it is true that our films tend to confine themselves to very limited areas of social experience, and as a matter of tactics most of us would welcome a cinema which more accurately reflected the diversity of English life. But there is clearly no principle involved here. I know of a 'left-wing' critic who thinks that *Violent Playground* is a breakthrough just because it is shot in Liverpool and deals with ordinary people.

Films should be understandable by ordinary people

It is easy to laugh at this view

especially if you caricature it as a plea for crude simplification and the substitution of propaganda for art. But there is a real problem here, because our cultural class-system frustrates communication.

It is of course only possible to be interested in this problem if you can recognise that people may have the capacity to respond imaginatively to works of art even if they do not practise intellectual analysis. If you are one of those who believe that art is only for the few, and that you are one of the chosen, you will not be worried.

But in any case, what is involved is a cultural strategy, not cultural dilution.

2. The Contemporary Fallacy

There is obviously no special merit attached to the film that deals with the here and now. The idea that there is leads to films cluttered with sociological bric-à-brac—coffee bars, supermarkets etc. This kind of impulse is not to be found behind 'ear-to-the-ground' films such as those of the Boultings and Herbert Wilcox.

3. The Problem Fallacy

The idea that commitment demands films treating social problems and big subjects is one of the most common delusions. It is extraordinary that this should be so when one considers that the original debate sprang from Lindsay Anderson's critical article on *On the Waterfront*. Here in fact was a big film on a serious social problem, and one that was ostensibly on the 'right' side, having its real commitment exposed.

Many films of course do spring from a concern with problems, and within certain limits fair work can be produced by this method. But at its best the problem rigidly defines the limits to the range of feeling that can be explored. The dramatised TV documentary and the Ted Willis play are works of this kind. Stanley Kramer makes films in this way. The 'big subject' of *On the Beach* merely highlights the magazine nature of the treatment of character. Good films may certainly involve social problems but will not be about them. *Umberto D.*, *Living* and *Shadows* are not about old age, bureaucracy and colour prejudice.

4. The Realist Fallacy

Because almost all British films have failed to explore social relations, and because of the influence of Italian Neo-Realism, progressive cinema has tended to push in the direction of realism and naturalism. But there is no final theoretical position that would give exclusive sanction to this. It is a matter of strategy. It is important to establish this. The British cinema has caught up late. It may now be emerging to do finer work within a convention that no longer offers adequate opportunities. In the theatre John Osborne had to break with naturalism to say what he had to say in *The Entertainer* (In part, the weakness of the film was in confining it within the limits of naturalism). One of the most impressive and most underestimated contributions to the new theatre has been made by John Arden, a writer who clearly finds naturalism restrictive.

Clearly no serious critic could find himself committed to naturalism as a principle.

5. The Message Fallacy

It is at this point that the attack on what is thought to be committed criticism is most specific. The critic is accused of insisting that art should carry an important message, and of judging films from this point of view. The message is interpreted in political terms and the judgement is also political. This is denounced as subjective. The critic is accused of dragging into what should be a purely aesthetic matter his own personal, political and social prejudices.

pure art or objective
subjective or content
style or political judgement.

This is how the argument has usually been fought out.

To state it sharply reveals how false and misleading is the opposition.

The 'must have a message' school and the 'no message' school are really on the same side. Both assume something called art, to do with style, into which you can then put a message or not according to taste.

But this is obviously not how it works (or at least how it should work). An artist's 'message' is his

way of seeing his subject. And this way of seeing gives him his style. The meaning of the work is contained in the style. It can only be discovered in a response to the style. Equally a response to the style that does not elicit the meaning is an inadequate response. As Lindsay Anderson wrote in 'Stand Up Stand Up': 'It is the essence of poetry (in any medium) that the thing said cannot be critically distinguished from the way of saying it.' If only we had all started from there.

Sources Of Muddle

How did all these confusions arise? Partly from a semi-conscious resentment on the part of some critics at having to face the prospect of making serious judgements of any kind.

The 'Left' of course is not entirely free from blame. In some cases Left critics may have overpraised work of the 'new realism', and on the extreme fringe, the *Daily Worker* film critic has her own special brand of Marxism. But the critics of commitment could hardly have her in mind, as she joined forces with the 'Right' in denouncing Jimmy Porter for not getting a steady job and his wife for not giving the place a much needed clean-up. (It is clear however that some critics think they are still arguing the old-fashioned social realist question). By and large the kind of left-wing committed critic ever ready to make crude political judgements does not exist.

This accounts for an odd fact in Penelope Houston's article, 'The Critical Question' (*Sight and Sound*, Autumn 1960).

She writes first of all that there has been so much confusion as to what the word commitment means that 'a certain restatement is still necessary'. Pretty rapidly after that however she concludes that 'there is no point in discussing here the arguments for committed criticism. They ought to be familiar by now.'

A good part of the article is given over to an attack on the 'French line' as expressed by the 'reactionaries' writing for *Oxford Opinion*. Not a difficult task certainly in the English form, where the specific judgements seem to have been taken over but the theoretical basis left in Paris. However this attack is well

done. People are quoted so that we know what we are talking about. But in the slight handling of the 'Left-wing critics' no-one is quoted. There are only the usual generalisations about 'naggers', 'double standards' and even 'cultural gaulleiers'. The reason that there are no equivalent quotes is simply that within the terms of the argument as presented there are virtually no such critics to quote from.

Obviously the most useful way would have been to look at actual pieces of criticism — preferably the criticism of Anderson and others that has appeared in *Sight and Sound*. But then this would really have involved a 'certain restatement'.

In fact it is the general run of critics who claim a vague liberal position who are consistently taken in by the big subject, ever ready to judge a film by its plot outline and dismiss it or approve it for its subject matter and overt moral position.

It really is pointless to quote here. The examples are in the papers every week: Peter Burnup on *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*; almost anybody on *The Angry Silence*.

Receiving The Message

In an extremely interesting article on the critics of *Cahiers du Cinema* in the Autumn *Sight and Sound*, Richard Roud quotes René Guyonnet on the problem. Discussing why many people cannot take certain kinds of film seriously he writes: 'But Westerns and films noirs are perhaps the best test of the film critic because their value is so often a matter of form, technique, iconography: all the elements which separate the cinema from literature.'

Then again: '... There is, beyond the appearance of stupidity, a meaning to be understood (a meaning which does not necessarily raise the question of the fate of humanity, but one which is nevertheless worthy of consideration). It is the critic's job to extract this meaning...'

Precisely. The way in which the meaning is extracted is through a response to the style. The process is described by Professor William Walsh writing about Dr. F. R. Leavis in *The New Statesman*, 26th March,

1960. 'Criticism, as Leavis conducts it, is the relevant, delicately attentive analysis of a complete response to literature; it is a commentary upon the act by which one enters into as full as possible a possession of the experience given in the words. When sensibility is made articulate there will be found in it elements of judgements and discrimination. But they are explicit in the account only because they are implicit in the response. They are distilled by the experience itself, not items carted in from outside.'

With qualifications, I agree with Richard Roud that there is nothing wrong with the French theory except its application. But in its application the style is thought of as an isolated element, a series of 'beautiful' shots, rather than as a unified expression of meaning.

Richard Roud writes about painting that form is paramount over content 'as far as the two can be separated'. But the qualification is all important, and seems to me to invalidate this sort of sentence: — 'There is, in effect, nothing wrong with a B-picture story. And, to be sure, the great director can transform it into a work of art. But the most satisfying work of art is surely the one in which the content, or the story, doesn't have to be transcended.'

This is a difficult point, but the film maker who transforms a B-picture story is no longer dealing with a B-picture story. What makes a detective story B is its treatment and not the fact that it is about detectives and criminals. (The substitution of the word transcend for transform in the quotation confuses the matter.) In the transformation the neutral structure is infused with a new and significant life and there is no reason why the artist should not say all he has got to say in this form. It was to this problem that Zavattini referred when he wrote: — 'In America, lack of subjects for films causes a crisis. One cannot be short of themes while there is still plenty of reality... A woman is going to buy a pair of shoes. Upon this elementary situation it is possible to build a film.'

Committed Criticism and Values
'The Commitment question', wrote Penelope Houston, 'still remains

central to any discussion of a critical theory.' If we see our problem as teasing out the values embedded in the style of the film I think this undercuts most of the confusions that have cropped up in the argument.

Obviously many films have no style because they have no real unifying attitude behind them. Such films may be polished, and in isolated passages skilful, but they are confused and lacking in meaning. Such a film is *Bridge On The River Kwai*.

Other films have a style, but it is one which is picked up from the work of other directors or from an arbitrary theory about the way films should be made. The style is artificially imposed on the subject. It is less an expression of attitude than a substitute for it. Parts at least of the work of J. Lee-Thompson fall into this category.

Films like these have no unity. They are lacking integrity.

The film of integrity, that is to say the film in which the style is a successful expression of the attitude, offers special problems.

If we take the case of *Triumph Of The Will* the characteristic response to this film is to say that it is brilliant but that its philosophy is unacceptable. But this is a misleading judgement. It is true that in *Triumph Of The Will* there is a considerable control of the means of film expression and that this superbly reveals the film makers' purpose. It is a film of integrity. We can call this craftsmanship brilliant if we like, but we are not yet making a judgement on the film. When we go on to call this film Fascist it should be clear that what we are doing, before we are making judgement, is describing its quality. Now this is a quality of style. It is the elements of style — the lighting, the angle at which the images are presented to us, their relationship in sequence and the sound — which are Fascist. If this sounds too crude we shall have to use words like vulgar or bombastic. Apart from the meanings thus conveyed there is no Fascist 'content' or 'message' or 'subject matter'. The subject matter — the soldiers, people and objects photographed is neutral because they could have been treated in quite a different way.

The Fascism is not a judgement brought in by a politically prejudiced observer but it is a quality discovered in the film.

To discover it requires a response to the art of the cinema. To make the discovery requires all our awareness, our sensitivity and experience. We can see here how meaningless the argument about subjective and objective criticism becomes. It is often said in response to those who call for objective criticism that no critic can shed all his accumulated experience to offer to each film a virgin personality. If of course such a thing were possible the critic would find the film meaningless.

A film is a act of collaboration with the viewer. All the time we are being asked to respond to hints and suggestions and create a world. In the good film these clues are many, the life portrayed is closely textured. In the bad film the clues are slight, the life portrayed is schematic. This is why the bad film may be open to various interpretations. We are not offered enough to go on. The good film builds up a weight and accumulation of created life that calls for a deeper response, but at the same time it tends to narrow this response down to a limited interpretation.

But if the prime critical duty is the discovery of the values of the work this discovery inevitably becomes a judgement.

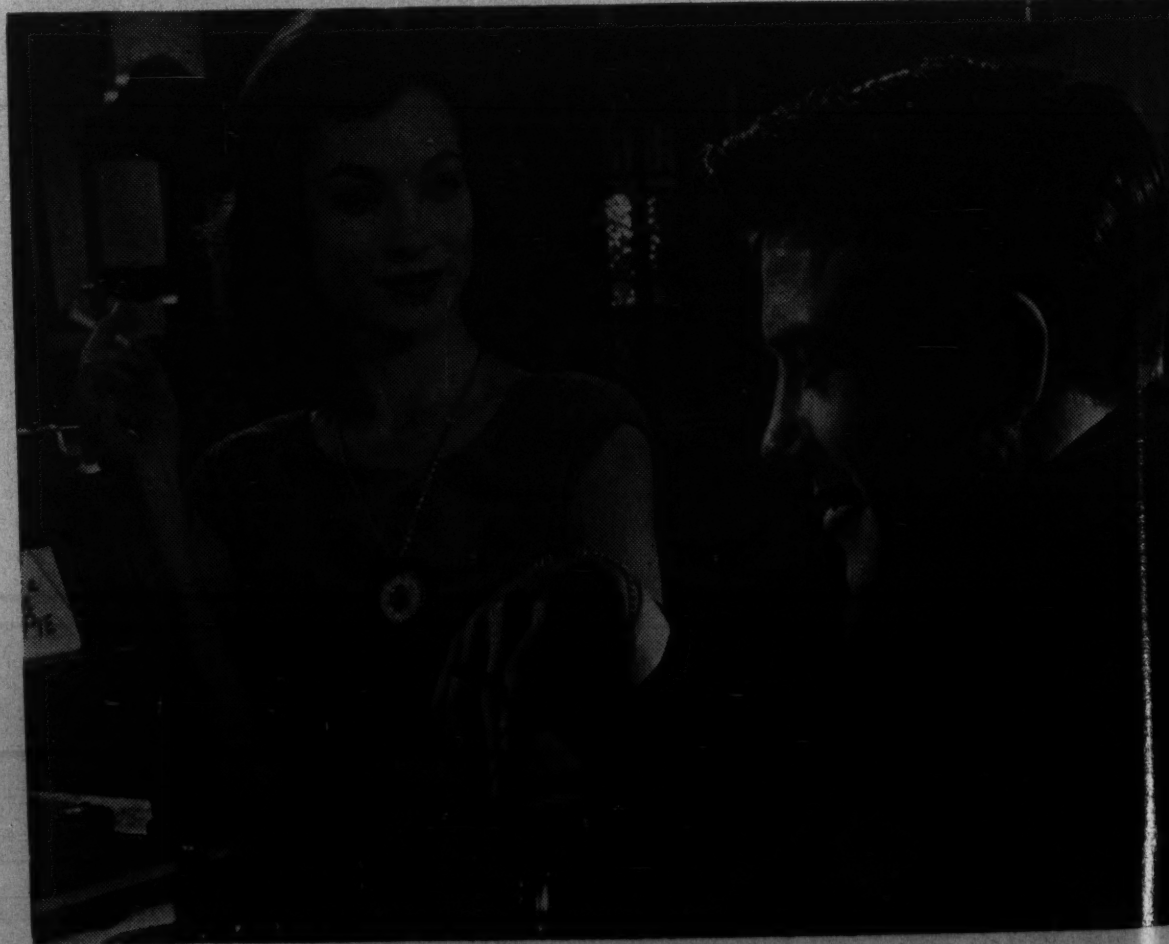
In the case of *Triumph Of The Will* it becomes a negative judgement. But not of course for those who share its philosophy. Ultimately we are brought up against this problem. We may show that a film carries qualities of compassion, but between those who admire and uphold such feelings and those who reject or distrust them there can be no common ground.

When we enter into great films and discover their meaning we are thrust back again into life. Because Art is not neutral. Some would like it to be. By an ill-defined liberalism they blur the act of discovery to avoid the inevitable judgement. They evade the moral demands of art by escaping into the consolidation of formal beauties or the comfort of ideology.

— Paddy Whannel

Saturday night *and* Sunday morning

BOLESŁAW SULIK



remember seeing Karel Reisz interviewed on television by Riccardo Annino, soon after the premiere and initial success of *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*. A moment before Karel Reisz came onto the screen the interviewer announced that he did not hold with those who regard a director as the film's author. Film, he argued, is a collective art, almost anonymous, like medieval gothic cathedrals. Mr. Annino's sense of timing—not to speak about his views on cinema—must be as disastrously bad as his tact.

Saturday Night and Sunday Morning is completely a director's film, yet few reviewers seemed to have realised this. Perhaps the fact that it was based on the best-selling novel, and the screen-play credited to the book's author, has misled them. But Alan Sillitoe's novel was not adapted—it was used, freely and creatively.

Even the plot was considerably changed. Sillitoe's rather rambling narrative makes only loose connections between various isolated incidents. Arthur Seaton's life is a shapeless mess; the events do not seem to lead one to the other. Arthur's association with Brenda, the married woman, never comes to any real climax: when she becomes pregnant the prescribed treatment works and they can resume their relationship on the same terms. Later, when the two "swaddies" beat him up for playing around with married women, and Arthur comments that it was "not the first time he had been in a losing fight", he is doing no more than stating a fact. Even his meetings with Doreen fail to build up a relationship convincing and strong enough to justify Arthur's sudden decision to marry and change his mode of life.

In the film the incidents are selected from the novel, modified and connected up in such a way that they form a continuous chain of cause and effect. Brenda's attempt at abortion fails and this of course breaks up her relationship with Arthur and leaves him with vague feelings of guilt (strangely enough the censor has played a material

part in the successful adaptation of the novel's plot. The original intention was to leave the abortion sequence more or less as it stands in the book. Karel Reisz hoped to make it grotesque and ugly and powerful enough to suggest its lasting impact on Arthur's mind. But the Board of Censors objected to this treatment and the director and writer were forced to change the script. And yet Karel Reisz admits that he has never regretted making those changes. This must be the only case on record of BBFC making a really creative contribution to a film. The beating up comes as a real climax, Arthur's symbolic retribution. After this Arthur has to make a new start. The *Sunday Morning* part follows naturally, as a logical epilogue.

Even more striking than this rearrangement of the book's structure is the change in attitude. Alan Sillitoe's novel gives a powerful expression to a personal brand of romantic anarchism, destructive and passionate, but perhaps lacking a clear sense of direction in spite of its political implications. It is a first person novel, rather egotistic, with the outlines of all subsidiary characters, especially women, blurred or dissolved. Arthur and his personal rebellion envelop everything. The film, on the other hand, places Arthur at a certain distance and encircles him with sharply observed minor characters. It becomes a serious study in working-class manners and makes a political—or moral—statement only indirectly, through the quality of life described. The difference between the novel and the film amounts to no less than a difference between a romantic and a rational approach to a similar theme, between an excitable gesture of defiance and a controlled and logical construction.

It is in the cinema that we find this film's genuine artistic antecedents: Karel Reisz's own *Momma don't Allow* and *We Are the Lambeth Boys*. In fact rarely do we find such a straight and consistent line of development. *Momma . . .*, an early "free cinema" documentary about jazz clubs, which Karel Reisz

co-directed with Tony Richardson, seems now rather amateurish and clumsy, but even there one recognises a genuine attempt to find a level where it would be possible to describe young working-class people without a superior, patronizing attitude, and an avoidance of all journalistic labels. "*We Are the Lambeth Boys*", the peak of "free cinema", represents a fulfillment, in a documentary form, of this search. *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* carries it into a field of fiction, observing the other, the private side of young worker's life. In fact the two films together form a statement so complete that it is difficult to imagine what more can Karel Reisz achieve in this direction without repeating himself.

As a study in manners *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* is undoubtedly successful. Amazingly so, when one considers that Karel Reisz had no tradition to draw from and many pitfalls to avoid. He started, it is true, with two advantages: Alan Sillitoe's excellent dialogue and several good and well cast actors. Against this one has to count his lack of experience in handling professional actors and the fact that he was leading his players into a territory which in British cinema is a virgin land. His achievement here is really tremendous. One says this not to belittle the creative contribution made by individual actors. There are some very good and some not-so-good performances, but there is not one that rings false; and for this the director must take the credit.

Albert Finney as Arthur Seaton is equal to the technical demands the part makes on him, and has just that touch of personal magnetism, "star quality" if you like, needed to establish Arthur as a focal point of the environment. Arthur's early undisciplined rebelliousness is conveyed beautifully, and his growing awareness, leading to the final acceptance of responsibility is equally well managed. This is, of course, of the greatest importance, because Arthur, perhaps with the exception of Brenda, is the only character conceived dynamically, changing, developing, gaining weight with

each succeeding sequence. The others are merely stated and related to Arthur so as to create a firm frame of social reference around him. Brenda, Arthur's married mistress, extremely well played by Rachel Roberts, supplies a note of real human tragedy, necessary, I think, to give the film true stature. Shirley Anne Field is surprisingly effective as Doreen. Her great beauty, which one was afraid might seem out of place in this story, is turned into an asset. Physical attractiveness, coupled with a pleasant manner, goes some way towards explaining Arthur's infatuation for such an essentially conventional girl. Hylda Baker as Aunt Ada, wise and cynical, conveying richness of experience in every word and gesture, completes a trio of successful female characters. Among the men, Norman Rossington is excellent as Bert. Quiet and authentic, he gives great solidity to Bert's friendship with Arthur.

What one remembers about *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* apart from Arthur's character study, is a rich texture of minutely observed human behaviour, rather than any "cinematic style". The film is shot in a quiet, self-effacing manner, the camera being usually placed at a distance making possible an intimate and yet detached observation. Karel Reisz avoids big close-ups, anything smacking of melodrama, sensationalism or artificial "hotting up" of the story. Thus the fight scene is filmed entirely in a long shot, and only after it is finished are we taken closer to inspect the damage: Arthur's smashed, swollen, ugly face. The only departure from it and, it seems to me, the director's only false step, is a fairground sequence. There Karel Reisz falls into an obvious temptation of constructing a virtuoso passage. In a resulting mechanical excitement the motivation of Arthur's actions becomes blurred: the camera is taken for a breathless ride. Curiously, in the context of this film the bravura passage seems unoriginal, conventional. Fortunately, it does not last long. We are soon to the wonderful sanity of the rest of *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*. But within this controlled and uniform

style, the use of camera movements, editing and lighting is considerably varied. One has only to compare the love-making with Brenda, which has a certain documentary objectivity about it, with a lyrical quality the director gets into a similar scene between Arthur and Doreen.

The film is also strikingly successful as a piece of narrative. This is all the more note-worthy because the plot is rather feeble. Little really happens. Karel Reisz overcomes this by shrewd and daring pacing, and overlapping sequences, sometimes not obviously connected. Of course, the richness of sympathetic observation also helps. The bare plot could not sustain the interest in this way. As it is Karel Reisz does almost too well. The narrative becomes so brisk, so smooth and self-contained, that one could almost wish for some frayed edges. But this is, perhaps, carrying criticism too far.

Karel Reisz has made a film which one can respond to and enjoy on several levels at once. It is a popular film, obviously seriously intentioned, entertaining, but not distracting. I think it will be enjoyed by a working class audience and related by them to their own experience. It is, almost ideally, exactly a kind of film that is needed at this particular time.

Where now? One should perhaps sound a word of warning. This careful avoidance of sensationalism, fear of overstatement, may yet develop into an inhibition and restrict Karel Reisz's great potential. Whatever theme he tackles next, one hopes that having now mastered the techniques, he will let himself go.

Saturday Night and Sunday Morning ends with a beautiful scene, where the director perhaps for a moment identifies himself with his central character. Arthur throws stones at the new housing estate where he may soon live. Reprimanded by Doreen, he answers: "these won't be the last stones I will throw, either". Let's hope that this applies to Karel Reisz, too. In a dreary British Cinema these stones are precious.

The World of Susie Wong

The World of Suzie Wong is what they call an entertainment film. And, by the standards implied in the art-v-entertainment antithesis, it is undoubtedly a good entertainment film. Not only has no expense been spared in the hiring of top-class stars, the capturing of local detail and the construction of magnificent sets to match with the location footage, but in addition a good deal of cinematic talent has been brought to bear upon the filming of it. One might, for instance, quote several examples of the director's sensitive use of vertical movement within the frame. At one point, when Robert Lomax has dressed Suzie in the costume of an ancient Chinese empress, he stands looking at her for a moment, then crosses towards her. The camera, tracking with him, cranks up slightly as he mounts the steps on which she is standing; and this little move imparts to the scene an impulse of joy which renders any verbal declaration of Robert's feelings unnecessary. In another sequence, when Robert is arriving back at his hotel in a rickshaw, he is seen in high angle long-shot with the camera rising slightly. This movement has no functional justification; but it serves to create a sense of expectancy for the emotional tensions which are to follow. Then again, during the landslide episode there is one terrifying shot in which the steep hillside, which forms the whole background, crumbles and collapses behind the foreground

characters, all sense of spatial orientation thus being temporarily lost. All in all, then, this is a worthy piece of filmcraft; and its final effect is to leave us feeling 'kind of good inside'. But just *what* kind of good does it make us feel?

Basically it is a piece of wish-fulfilment. Robert Lomax is an architect who has saved some money, thrown up his job and retired to Hong Kong for a year to try and make his living as an artist. In other words, he is doing what ninety-five percent of the audience would dearly like to do if only they had the courage or hadn't the responsibilities. Having settled in an hotel in a ramshackle district, he falls in love with a beautiful and confusing bar-room girl, and finally marries her. What man would not be attracted to the kaleidoscopic Nancy Kwan? And what adolescent has not dreamed of winning the love of a prostitute? But still, there is nothing wrong with wish-fulfilment; and in any case that is not the whole story. In admitting his love for Suzie, Robert has to face up to the hypocritical sympathy and the out-and-out condemnation of his fellow-Europeans: for he has broken taboos on both the racial and the social level. This means that for the film to *work* as wish-fulfilment we must engage with it in a rejection of racial and class barriers, and share with it in an

affirmation of common humanity. If such a theme can be put across in the full splendour of cinematic language, should it not receive our unqualified approval? Let us examine the film more closely.

In an early sequence we see Lomax wandering through the milling crowds of the Hong Kong street markets, looking for an hotel at which to stay, and reacting with puzzled interest to the life around him. A ragged family sits eating on the pavement; food is displayed in the heat of the sun; washing hangs across the balconies of dilapidated tenements; a naked child is bathed in bucket at the roadside... The handling of this sequence is crucial to the whole film: for what is shown to us is photographed in such a manner that the colour and bustle strike our attention, while the filth and squalor remain subsidiary and are almost negated. The effect is of snap-shots or of colour postcards brought to life. It is the vision of the tourist. Tracking shots from Lomax' viewpoint alternate with shots of him walking between the stalls and shots tracking backwards as he moves towards us. This is a normal enough technique for integrating a character with his milieu; but in this case the result is that Lomax becomes integrated with the milieu as *he* sees it. Thus by the end of his stroll through the markets he is no longer merely seeing with the eyes of the tourist, but is himself

portrayed within the terms of reference of the tourist's vision. The essence of the tourist's vision is that whilst everything is unfamiliar, nothing is alien: for the tourist finds the unexpected only where he expects to find it. That this is the outlook of the film is borne out by the sparing but significant use of traditional jokes about the Chinese (one character always addresses Robert as 'Lobert'). And naturally, Robert Lomax seems quite at home in any situation in which he finds himself.

At first sight, Suzie herself might seem to provide an exception to this. The story, after all, is that of two people coming together across the gulf which separates alien personalities, alien cultures, alien ways of life. But it soon becomes evident that the 'mystery' of Suzie Wong is not essential mystery: it is the mystery of the thriller. It consists entirely in the fact that we are kept perpetually guessing as to the motives behind her behaviour — in particular her compulsive lying. And these motives, once revealed, are always perfectly comprehensible. There is, of course, a real difference in moral attitude between Robert and Suzie; and, schematically speaking, the film tells of his gradual decision to move out half way to meet her, then of his success in moving back with her to his own ground. Thus when they finally resolve to sleep together she says to him, 'You my first man. You believe?' and he replies, 'I believe. And you're my first girl'. This gesture of Robert's in entering into her world of lies and fantasy has a double-edged significance: for we are soon made to realize that he has in fact come nowhere near to accepting her attitudes; and they have a violent quarrel over moral conduct. It is worth noting, too, that the subject of venereal disease, presumably as prevalent in Hong Kong as anywhere else, is not even hinted at. The scene from which the above remarks are quoted is played in extreme long-shot: Suzie and Robert stand a few feet from each other almost until the concluding fade out; and the camera tracks round and cranes down, describing a beautiful descending arc

around the fringes of the room. The effect is serene — almost spiritual. And spirituality, in this context, is a form of evasion.

Despite Robert's remorse, and despite his assurance that 'I know she needs me', there seems little reason to believe that he and Suzie could have settled their differences after the quarrel in which he viciously insults her. But in fact they are never required to. The rains come, bringing devastation to the hillside shanty-town where Suzie's baby lives in the care of a friend; and she returns to Robert to ask his help in breaking through the police cordon. Meanwhile a cheque has arrived to solve the financial problem which sparked off the row. It is disturbing to consider the flood sequences. Seen in isolation, these might constitute a hideous little documentary on the condition of the Hong Kong poor. But the poetic tone of the whole film reflects back upon the part: and the image of these floods takes its quality from their relevance to the lives of the central characters. The nightmare remains; but it is nightmare robbed of its terror by the certainty of a rosy future. For the floods have

brought Robert and Suzie together and they have also killed the baby which, being illegitimate child of a high-ranking official, might have proved an embarrassment. The touching simplicity of the funeral ceremony makes a perfect setting for Robert's proposal of marriage.

So the human situation is swept away by the indiscriminate force of Nature. And we hardly notice that the little tag '...for goodness sake', used to indicate Suzie's lack of education, has been quietly dropped in the final third of the film. She is now as nice an American kid as you could wish to come across. Robert will marry her; but what does he stand to lose? He no longer requires the good will of the local Europeans, as his cash comes from an art dealer in London; and anyway we are in the world of the travel brochure, where dirt, disease and suffering simply do not exist.

Perhaps this film does imply an affirmation. But it is an affirmation bought at little cost, and measured against no resistance. That is what they mean by 'entertainment'.

Dai Vaughan



Shadows

SHADOWS has been widely publicized as an improvisation. When Ian Jarvie says that this claim seems 'in no significant sense true', he is presumably thinking of the way in which the resources of cinema have been consistently employed to draw from the chosen material a significance above and beyond its literal value as a record of acting. Consider, for example, the complexity of attitudes communicated during the sequence in the art museum, where Ben is gazing at a primitive stone head, obviously impressed by it, while Tom off-screen is inveighing against Culture and against the professors who tried to teach him things which they had failed at in life themselves. Here is the art-versus-living controversy in a breath of day-to-day experience. A finer glimpse of the film-maker at work is afforded by the treatment of the pianist. This is the character, all winks and grins, who intervenes in the argument between Hugh and his manager to suggest that he introduce the girlie line with a couple of jokes — '...everybody likes jokes'. At first we take this man at his face value, gay and perhaps slightly irresponsible. It is only when he winks unnecessarily, once too often, that we realize his outer personality, initially a bright facade against a bleak environment, has degenerated under stress into the mechanical twitch of a neurotic. To include or to omit this self-damning gesture

was a decision made on the cutting bench.

From the cinematic point of view, then, *Shadows* was not improvised. Yet the fact remains that the characters of the film, the quality of their relationships, their responses to one another and the influence of these responses upon the progress of the plot were all worked up by the individual actors from only the slenderest framework of situation. The criterion of truth was taken to be the actors' conviction, and not — as in, say, the work of de Sica — the director's prior conception of how they should behave. The relation of director to subject was therefore the same as in any film where the action obeys its own laws and is outside his jurisdiction. By relying upon the ability of skilled actors to tap human feeling at its deepest sources (and let us remember that each actor was cast in a role which bore some resemblance to his own life), Cassavetes has crossed that threshold of intimacy beyond which documentary seemed sentenced by the logic of its nature never to tread: and *Shadows*, a documentary of the soul, has come to shock us with its realism.

What are we doing when we try to define realism? At first it may seem that one of two things is involved: either we attempt to frame a definition which will satisfy the con-

texts in which the term is normally employed; or else we say that the word has been used so vaguely as to defy analysis, and hence seek to place upon it the meaning which we feel it truly deserves. But in fact it is not so simple. If we examine the usage of the word 'realism' we will find that its salient quality is a sense of *approval* at a given treatment of reality. People may find conflicting styles 'realistic'; but few would condemn realism as such: and if I say that a Braque is more realistic than a Monet, I am understood to be saying something about the relation of these paintings to what I regard as essential in the objective world. Realism, unlike 'naturalism' or 'documentary', is not the name of a style or genre. It is a vote of confidence.

It will be clear, then, that no technique of film making, however interesting or valuable, can confer realism upon the product. Only our endorsement of it *as* realism can do that. Our definition must therefore be a personal one. For me, a realist film must not only conform to the obvious requirement that there shall be nothing manifestly false in the material details of the environment portrayed: it must also seem to place *trust* in reality, in the sense that its meaning must not depend ultimately upon the course or outcome of the action. This is admittedly a difficult standard to apply, since if we are not careful

we can become involved in meaningless questions as to whether the director 'deliberately' included a certain incident rather than allowing reality to speak for itself. Perhaps the safest way of putting it is to say that events must be granted their full contingency, and people their full freedom.

Possibly this is what Zavattini was getting at when he said that a neo-realist film should have no story and no plot. Thus the episodes in *Bicycle Thieves* have an air of having been arbitrarily selected from the continuum of life; and the 'end' is little more than a formal gesture of closing. *Potemkin* is the celebration of a single act of freedom — the men's refusal to fire on their

comrades — and makes its point without even raising the question of what eventually happened to the mutinous battleship. In *La Terra Trema* the outcome is significant only in so far as it shows an act of political freedom running aground upon the intransigence of the System, and thus implies a condemnation both of the System itself and of the villagers who have failed to co-operate with the family who rebel against it. On the other hand *Rashomon*, which deals with the impermanence of fact, would be unbalanced by the slightest miscalculation in its complex narrative. And although Martin's betrayal of Anne at the end of *Day of Wrath* is freely chosen, the film, which has been an elaborate preparation for

this moment, would make no point without it.

Throughout *Shadows* these requirements of realism are met. Few of the external events seem to have any significance beyond the mere fact that they happen. And in all moments of choice — even those indispensable to establishing the film's basic situation — we are left believing that the characters could very easily have behaved otherwise. Thus in the scene preceding Lelia's seduction she adopts an arch and affected tone which conveys to us her embarrassment at being alone with a new companion; and this, combined with the dreary anonymity of the street door to Tony's apartment, leads us to feel that she may



well raise the courage or the cowardice to refuse his invitation. Again, Hugh could have accepted his defeat, as we know he eventually must, and given up his vision of himself as a great blues singer to seek some other job. The only exception I can recall — a point where the contingency of events is not respected — occurs in the party scene, where Lelia discusses a short story which foreshadows the subsequent action, and Tony arrives just in time for her to illustrate her argument by kissing him.

But if we accept *Shadows* as a realist film, does this mean that we share in the almost bottomless pessimism with which it appears to regard both the general fate of its characters as individuals and also the more specific problem of race? Consider its solutions. Lelia, having rejected Tony's attempt at apology, ends by weeping on the shoulder of a good-natured but rather dull Negro; Ben shuffles off into the uncertainty of a neon-lit night; and Hugh's gay decision to carry on in the face of all obstacles is a pitiful irony, since we know that as a singer he is finished. More terrible still is the sequence where Ben is overcome with revulsion at his own

Negro blood: for here the images — Negro faces shot with grotesque emphasis, wild laughter divorced from the context of the joke — are presented directly to the audience; so that to understand this sequence and the feelings implied in it is to recognize the potentiality of such feelings in ourselves.

Yet in a sense this question has already been answered. The aesthetic impact of realism lies in the shock of recognition — recognition of the word, the gesture, the relationship which is humanly true. This accounts for the extraordinary difficulty of writing about *Shadows*: for how can one express in bare print the significance of the sequence where Tony meets Lelia's brother and discovers that he is a Negro? All one has is a series of close-ups, with expressions hovering over the faces like a seismographic record of inner disturbances. Further still, it might be said of *Shadows* that realism is not simply its mode of communication but also its sole content: for its characters are never seen in relation to the brute adversity of those forces which are *not* contingent — the Czarist army in *Potemkin*, unemployment in *Bicycle Thieves* or

the System in *La Terra Trema*. The recognition of human truth implies the acknowledgement of freedom. And in *Shadows* this is not only always latent but also, sometimes, explicit. Placed arbitrarily but conveniently at the close of the film is the scene where Ben, with due doubt and sheepishness, announces his decision to give up the pastime of aimlessly picking up girls and getting periodically beaten up for his efforts. This is even capped in the final images when he drifts away after a brief wait outside the shop where his friend has gone in to buy some cigarettes. For here is a gesture not only free, but gratuitous.

All right, the film has its flaws. But why be grudging? The joy of a film like *Shadows* is that it helps us to shrug off the scales of our worn formulations about humanity, and to start again from the raw material of what people really are. Some may find in it, understandably, a current of hopelessness: but those who do will be responding primarily to the mechanics of the plot. And to argue from the mechanics of plot is to deny the film its status as realism.

Dai Vaughan

Crosseyed Luck

Andrzej Munk's new film is a logical extension of his previous work, a further instalment of his examination of conformist pressures in contemporary Poland. Even if "contemporary" is in this case a notion covering a span of about 20 violent years from the thirties to the fifties. In *Crosseyed Luck* Munk presents an ironic review of recent Polish history, as seen, or rather experienced, by a simple minded, naive conformist. No one is better equipped to attempt a film of this kind. There is a strong sense of history in both *Man on the Tracks* and

Eroica, an implied deep perspective, against which the conflicts of to-day are fought. In *Crosseyed Luck* this historical perspective is brought out into the foreground and illuminated with the same ruthless, detached, intellectual irony we know from the first part of *Eroica*. At the center we find another of Munk's anti-heroes, Jan Piszczek, a little man, plagued by ill-fortune. Piszczek, middle-aged and a prisoner, relates the story of his life to the warden. In his efforts to succeed, to be accepted, to become an integral part of his environment, he always fol-

lowed popular trends, and yet always failed: as a boy scout, a politically minded student, a lover, a soldier, a captive in a POW camp and underground fighter, money hoarder, and a Stalinist bureaucrat. Only in prison does he find a true peace, but the warden is unmoved by pleas to let him stay there. And so Piszczek has to face freedom again.

The film, by the way, was screened at the London and Edinburgh festivals as *Bad Luck*, but *Crosseyed Luck*, a literal translation from

Polish seems a more suitable title. At least it reflects in some measure the film's irony. The question may seem so marginal, as not to be worth bothering about, but the clumsy and unnecessary retitling of Polish films arriving in this country is building up a tradition so consistent that it is becoming a source of irritation. The re-titling is being done in Poland, by — it would seem — some ardent student of the British 'B' feature field. *Kanal* arrives as *They Loved Life* (in this case, fortunately, British distributors stuck to the original title), *The Camp of Dead Men* as *The Damned Roads*, and Passendorfer's *Zamach* which should be interpreted as either *The Attempt*, or *Assassination*, changes into *Answer to Violence*.

The 'hero' of *Crosseyed Luck* is a more complex character than might at first seem. Piszczek is not just an unsuccessful conformist, a man who chanced to live in a country and in times singularly hard for people with his type of mentality. What causes him to fall out of step with fast moving and capricious history is not opportunism, or even lack of cleverness, but sincerity. He is ready to embrace whole-heartedly new ways of life, to accept genuinely scales of values handed down to

him. And in our world sincerity is a fatal handicap. One should realise that life is play-acting and tomorrow one may be given another and a different part to play. Piszczek's enthusiasm makes him eventually suspect even in the eyes of his Stalinist bosses. When he imitates other people's postures and manners, he brings to his new attitudes a degree of emotional involvement, entirely lacking in his original models. He is also a timid man, harbouring a deep inferiority complex and this leads him sometimes into lying, in a desperate bid to impress others. But there is no place in his make up for cynicism. That's his trouble.

The screen play of *Crosseyed Luck* was written for Munk as an original story by J. S. Stawinski (who also worked with Munk on his previous two films), and only afterwards published in a form of a novel. One would like to know, how close is the relationship between the writer and the director, how much does Stawinski contribute to Munk's films. Stawinski is perhaps Poland's best known screen writer having been responsible, among others, for screen plays of Wajda's *Kanal*, Passendorfer's *Zamach* (*Answer to Violence*) and Aleksander Ford's *Teut-*

onic Knights. This record seems to suggest, that adaptability is one of Stawinski's strong qualities. He seems able to provide acceptable material for directors of divergent styles and outlook, but in his screen-writing career the association with Munk has been longest, and, certainly, most fruitful. This suggests at least some temperamental affinity between the two. At any rate the director's authority in *Man on the Track*, *Eroica* and *Crosseyed Luck* is so evidently strong that there cannot be much doubt as to who is the dominant personality in the partnership.

Piszczek tells his story in a series of flashbacks and Munk tries to preserve the feeling, shape and character of a first person narrative taken from a particular angle and covering a long span of time. In each episode he picks out the most essential and characteristic elements, skipping lightly over the rest. There is no attempt 'to evoke the mood of period', to transfer the audience back in time. Instead, he uses trick techniques consistently, speeding up movement, enlarging and changing the background within the shot etc. In the childhood episode he even parodies silent movies, as they appear to us now, cutting out frames to achieve the characteristically jerky and angular movement, and using sound effects without the dialogue. It is a measure of Munk's skill that these techniques form an organic part of the narrative and never seem obtrusive or mechanical. At worst they give the film a slightly literary, or at any rate a curiously non-visual quality, although the methods are very much of the cinema.

The great virtues of *Crosseyed Luck* are its formal refinement and Munk's sharp aim when he attacks his political targets. The absurd, artificially inflated nationalism of the young and weak Polish State before the war and equally absurd, but more terrifying Stalinist practices after it are brilliantly exposed and caricatured. But the film finally stands or falls by its central character and here, I fear, Munk was not entirely successful. The fault lies partly with the story, by nature



repetitious. It reaches its climax too soon, in the occupation sequence, when Piszczyk meets and loses his great true love. At this moment *Crosseyed Luck* touches real human tragedy. Piszczyk's fate is resolved, the character stops developing. But there is still a sizeable chunk of history to be reviewed and so the film has to go on. Unfortunately, the next episode is the film's weakest and this strengthens the feeling of anti-climax. The film picks up again in the last, 'Stalinist' sequence, but Piszczyk remains there only as a motive for action, rather than a living character.

Bogumil Kobiela's performance is able and well thought out, but somehow lacks edge. Changes in the character are not managed sharply and decisively enough and in consequence Piszczyk becomes a predictable and slightly dull personality. One doubts whether such interpretation was really intended. This does not mean that I agree with those who criticise Munk's direction of *Crosseyed Luck* for its relative lack of comic invention. It was not meant to be a hilarious, side-splitting comedy. The unpleasant political truths are too near the surface, attitudes are dramatised

directly. If anything, one could question the wisdom of including the few short passages of slapstick which the film contains. I suspect that Piszczyk would gain more than lose by being played 'straight'.

It is obvious that *Crosseyed Luck* was artistically a uniquely difficult undertaking, and not surprisingly Munk made of it only a partial success. With all qualifications his film remains an original, polished and intensely serious comedy.

Boleslaw Sulik

THREE RUSSIAN FILMS

The generic term 'Russian' applies to these three films not as a description of natural origin so much as a rude word meaning old-fashioned. They belong to another cinematic age—at the latest pre-*Citizen Kane*—at the earliest Victorian. It is no matter that there was no cinema in Victorian times; if there had been it would have looked like this.

White Nights, its sound track choked with heavy-scented music, its colour turning flesh to putrefaction and enveloping its stagey sets in pink and blue mists, shuns all refinement and settles for a broad theatrical style of acting strong of gesture and sparing of subtle facial expression as though the camera were chained statically to a seat in a theatre's stalls. It would be wrong to compare it with Visconti's *White Nights* which, after all, is a film. Its most daring moment is a parody of a Douglas Fairbanks Sen. silent film—possibly the most recent example of the American cinema known to the director.

Lady with the Little Dog is suspiciously subtle—a quality so rare in Russian movies that one viewer feels he may have mistaken high drama, tender moments of self-pity, strong passions, unrequited love and other noble emotions for the well-timed and delicious handling of the delicately ironic situation he found in it. A veil of soft focus photography of a milky lack of depth rather influences its style and what in other (non-Russian) films would have been amusing background action becomes an effective and tongue in cheek use of small-part players of some oddity on the periphery of the main events.

A similar milkiness, this time warm and sweet, marks *Ballad of a Soldier*—style 1920's Hollywood sentimental. Boy meets girl, boy loves girl, boy loses girl, boy meets mother is hardly an original variation on a not very original plot. Not content with this, the film audaciously uses every tear-stained cliché to bring tears to the eyes

WHITE NIGHTS

Ivan Pyriev

LADY WITH THE LITTLE DOG

Yosif Heifitz

BALLAD OF A SOLDIER

Grigori Chukhrai

and is so uninhibited and honest about it that, quite disarmingly, it succeeds. Its unrestrained and unabashed sentimentality make dislike of it impossible if not downright criminal—or so it seemed at the time.

One dazzling piece of high angle upside-down-turning camera virtuosity which wonderfully conveys the young-soldiers sense of isolation, fear and uncertainty as he runs across the battle field from the approaching enemy tanks seems stimulatingly out of place if not out of another less cosy film (it is too—it comes from Bondarchuk's *Destiny of a Man*) and the narration at the film's close is a disturbing, ominous and bellicose commercial on the qualities of Russian soldiers—"Use Russian soldiers—They fight hardest—last longest—kill most people and can be used for all kinds of jobs around Europe".

Kieran Hickey

A TOAD IN THE BREAD

It is important to see Bergman's new film in its context in his line of development. The theme of *The Virgin Spring* has clear affinities with the themes of *Wild Strawberries* (from an original script) and *So Close to Life* (whose script, like that of *The Virgin Spring*, was by Ulla Isaksson). *Wild Strawberries* (surely a more completely achieved work of art than *The Seventh Seal*) made clear the supreme moral importance Bergman attaches to self-understanding: the old man, tormented at the opening of the film by dreams of death and of unfulfilled life, "is brought to clarity and reconciliation" (to use Bergman's own words) only through having his picture of himself, a picture he has spent a life-time building up, torn to shreds, allowing him at last to see himself as he really is. The subconscious mind knows the truth, and no effort of the conscious will can deceive or lull it into acceptance of the false, ideal picture: it disturbs, undermines, torments,

rounds on the psyche by throwing up horrifying images and symbols, allowing no peace. In *So Close to Life* we were presented with the apparent paradox of the woman (Eva Dahlbeck) who behaves as the model mother-to-be, consciously longing for the birth of her child, yet, despite the frantic efforts of will to control body, destroys it in the birth-process; and the young girl (Bibi Andersson) who has done all she can to destroy her unwanted illegitimate child before birth (feeling herself cast off and unwanted by her own mother) yet whose body refuses to let the child die. By the end of the film the woman, her conscious picture of herself as the warm, positive, ideal mother shattered by her terrible ordeal, has become a vindictive wreck, while the girl, reconciled with her own mother, is reconciled too to the idea of motherhood and the task of being the instrument of creativity. The very close connection between these themes and the concerns of *The*

Virgin Spring will soon become clear. Also in common is the subversive moral outlook, which refuses to be taken in by appearances even when the "appearance" is one of the sacred cows of our society (the Ideal Mother, the Perfect Father); and the positive upward movement towards health and affirmation, achieved by boldly confronting the extremes of horror and suffering of which humanity is capable.

Bergman and Ulla Isaksson have been praised by certain Swedish critics for their close adherence to the old ballad on which the *The Virgin Spring* is based (as if this were in itself a matter for praise or blame!). In fact, they have departed from it in various particulars of fundamental importance, and an attempt at a detailed interpretation of the film can well begin by examining the chief additions and alterations, which must obviously have particular significance (or why make them?). Four especially stand out:—

1. The addition of Ingeri and all that is connected with her, including the old man in the hut and the toad, none of which is mentioned in the ballad.
2. The transformation of one of the herdsmen into a child: in the ballad all three are men and all three rape Karin ("First was she three herdsmen's woman").
3. The whole sequence of the birch-tree and the bastu.
4. The great emphasis laid on the spring, and the transference of its appearance to the end of the story. In the ballad, the spring appears when Karin is killed (the three herdsmen cut her head off) and is glossed over briefly in one line of verse—it could even be taken as a metaphor for the blood gushing from the neck: "They struck the head from her body, at once a spring ran up"



Farther, Ulla Isaksson herself has shown in a recent interview that Bergman altered important details in her script, the most significant being that originally the boy was to have had a much more active part in catching Karin during the rape sequence. (Bergman's insistence on the child's almost complete innocence is not, I hope to show, due to sentimentality, nor is it a sop to popular taste). Miss Isaksson's article suggests a much simpler attitude to the problems of evil and belief than Bergman shows in his film; and, remembering that almost every important point in the film is made *visually*, one wonders if Bergman's alterations haven't, in fact, been more extensive than Miss Isaksson realises. Her remarks, however, while accounting for little of the film's complexities, do provide a useful starting point for an analysis. She says: "I want to discuss the problem of guilt and innocence, to show that *we all share the guilt* and that evil and good are forces within mankind which it is next to impossible to separate."

The key to the film lies in the symbol of the toad in the bread. Once the full significance of the toad is grasped, the rest of the film becomes clear, one can follow its logic step by step.

And its significance is, after all, hardly very obscure. Toads are traditionally associated with poison, bread with wholesomeness (insisted upon twice in the grace spoken both by Karin and her father). A wholesome exterior, then, concealing unknown poison within: the symbol, as we shall see, can be applied in different ways to all the principal personages of the film.

In a mature Bergman film (by which I mean any of his films since *Sawdust and Tinsel*) we are entitled to expect that every detail will have its significance regarding the whole, just as we would expect of a play by Shakespeare or a novel by Lawrence; only *A Lesson in Love* suffers from being judged by such criteria. In *The Virgin Spring* nothing is there *merely* to lend local colour or to give "medieval atmosphere": Bergman himself made it

clear in a television interview that he chose the Middle Ages solely in order to stylise and thereby intensify the action, freeing it from the distractions of modern "naturalism". An interpretation of the film, therefore, must satisfy *all* points made in the film: we must credit Bergman at least with artistic integrity and consistency: *Smiles of a Summer Night* and *The Virgin Spring* should at least have earned him *that*. That such an interpretation is possible I now hope to show.

In the film's opening moments we are given a picture of a girl trying to will herself to be deliberately evil, symbolically, depicted in the first shot by the efforts to blow up flames from smouldering wood. Ingeri poses and grimaces melodramatically, trying to make herself conform to the conventional picture of "evil", invokes "God Odin"; but we can see that her soul, her true nature, is not really in it. She is having deliberately to will herself, and at the same time is half-frightened by her own efforts. We pass then to Töre and his wife at prayers. Töre, obviously much younger than Märeta, is bored by the service (he yawns while reading the prayer) and repelled by his wife's sense of unformulated guilt which leads her to prostrate herself spiritually and burn her hands with hot candle-wax as an act of atonement, to give herself a sense of self-righteousness. The relationship is sketched in with Bergman's characteristic economy: within a few seconds we know that the wife is no longer attractive to her husband, that she harbours within her a sense of guilt which he refuses to be a party to, turning from her in disgust. Then a few dialogue exchanges arouse Ingeri's hatred and jealousy further, and as she leaves the breakfast table the camera rests a moment on the fire, brightly blazing.

The toad is introduced just after this. Ingeri finds it on the floor and puts it in the loaf of bread which Karin is to take with her to eat on the journey to church with the candles. Ingeri again is shocked at her own "evil"; but all she *consciously* intends is to administer a nasty shock

to the spoilt darling of the family, she is aware only of a mean, rather childish spite in herself. However, it is not difficult to see a deeper psychological meaning in her action: Karin, like the bread, appears perfect pure and wholesome, an innocent virgin; Ingeri, on the other hand, is with child, an illegitimate child she doesn't want. To Ingeri's subconscious, the toad is her unborn child: she wants to show that Karin too, whose angelic exterior seems to deny animal nature, has within her "forbidden" sexual desires; and this seems to be how the herdsmen interpret the toad when it is discovered. Immediately after placing the toad in the bread, Ingeri's hand rests for a moment on her belly, over the unborn child.

At once we are introduced to Karin herself. Her mother arouses her and dresses her. Märeta treats her daughter with mixed feeling, answers the girl's affectionate high spirits with only a bleak smile; and shows signs of sudden alarm when her husband enters the bedroom, although Karin is by then fully dressed. Karin shows girlish delight in the fine clothes she is to wear, she loves to look pretty and attractive; and she passes her hand over her belly with the same gesture as Ingeri—not the only striking visual parallel Bergman makes in the film. There follows the charming little love-scene (it *is* very charming) between father and daughter, which is one of the cruxes of the film. Their behaviour is very, very affectionate, Karin clings to her father, strokes his neck, embraces him delightedly, shows all the spirited gaiety of a young girl in love; and Töre returns it all after a moment's initial doubt, with a lover's tenderness. Bergman presents it all as charming and, in a sense, natural (what *is* nature, after all?): few seem to have noticed that we are being shown unequivocally, a mutual incestuous desire (how pleased Freud would have been at this confirmation of his theories, everyone accepting apparently without question the father-daughter relationship we are shown as perfectly innocent). The mother watches throughout with black mistrust and jealousy clear on her face. This good lady, a duti-

ful parent and a devout Christian, has had a nightmare of some disaster befalling Karin. Our dreams, according to Freud, contain the fulfillment of secret wishes which our conscious minds cannot accept; if the wish is strong enough to be nearly conscious the dream becomes a nightmare, the wish expressing itself almost naked instead of in innocent-seeming symbols. Hence Märeta's deep-rooted sense of guilt: she hates her daughter sufficiently to harbour a secret, suppressed desire for her destruction.

Karin and Ingeri set off, with the candles and the bread, Karin and her father exchanging one last loving embrace while the mother glares hostilely at them. Karin, then, has already had her sexuality awakened by her father; on the way, she flirts briefly with a sower in the fields, letting him lay his hand on her thigh and keep it there for some moments, treating him very much as she treated her father. And the sower, indeed, bears considerable resemblance to her father, he is tall, powerful, fair and bearded, though rougher, less "noble" in his manner and bearing. Hence he bridges the gap between Töre and Karin's third "lover", the tongueless brother. Those three are the only men in the film with beards.

A little later comes the scene with the old man in the hut in the woods. In the preposterous, caricatured old man we have a picture of conscious, deliberate evil: to Ingeri and to us he represents the state she was trying to work herself into at the beginning of the film. Of course he is ridiculous: of all the important characters in the film except the child and the religious farmhand, he is the one who does the least harm. Deliberate evil is monstrous and stupid, one can recognise it at once; the real danger is from the toad in the bread—the poison no one knows is there.

Just before the scene with the old man, Ingeri has had her premonition of some disaster befalling Karin: a close parallel to the mother's nightmare, the intensity of

Ingeri's desire for the disaster bringing on a corresponding sense of shame and terror. She begs Karin not to go on into the woods, where it is dark, and where terrible things can happen: woods being a common symbol for the subconscious. And so, of course, she flees in terror from the old man: of all things at that moment she least wants her suppressed evil desires forced into consciousness, or she would also (being fundamentally good) be forced to reject them: and nothing is more precious to us than hatred so malignant we dare not admit its existence even to ourselves.

The rape of Karin, then, can now be seen as the collective subconscious wish of all concerned (except the father, who wanted to do it himself). Karin herself encourages it: already sexually roused, she flirts coquettishly with the herdsmen and in turn arouses them. The animal desires which Ingeri represented with the toad are there: and to Karin's conscious mind they seem evil and base, too, as we see from her behaviour after the rape. Karin has an ideal picture of herself and her father: they are princess and king in a fairy-tale castle: she refuses to accept the reality of herself. No director has presented such a subtle and complex concept of "evil"—"evil" being, of course, that which causes harm. The three herdsmen are not presented, crudely, as "the forces of evil". Their position in the film is a curious one: they exist more as instruments and scapegoats than as "characters": if they had not existed it would have been necessary to invent them. They are made the representatives of evil by the other characters, just as Karin is made the representative of purity and goodness, but this is not the reality of the situation. Karin, in fact, not only encourages the rape but enjoys it: here is no conventional picture of virginal innocence (though it seems to have aroused the conventional stock reactions): rather, it is a picture of what "virginal innocence" is seen really to be when the rosy haze of sentimentality is cleared away. Having struggled against her first violater, Karin succumbs to the second (the eldest

brother), protest turning to ecstasy as the conscious will loses power (the point and justification of showing the rape in detail). Indeed, the close-up of the two faces just after the moment of climax, comes across, terribly, as one of the film's most beautiful moments. But with the return of full consciousness return the conventional pressures: Karin's stricken, paralysed horror, rendered with such painful accuracy, is primarily horror at herself: she doesn't look at the men, seems only to stare inwards at the reality of herself which she wishes to deny. It is this reaction that precipitates her death: we understand so well why the man *had* to kill her quickly, her suffocated sobs and agonized face are so unbearable. In her reaction she forces all the guilt on to *him*; and he deals with it exactly as we shall see Töre, more elaborately, deal with his own sense of guilt later, by trying to stamp it out.¹

The complexity of the toad symbol should by now be clear. Its meaning differs from character to character, and clearly it does not mean quite the same to us as it does to Ingeri. We are not to see sexual desire as in itself the "evil" but man's refusal to see and accept things as they really are: the substitution of the false, idealised picture for the reality.

The rape is far from being the point of the film, although — such is Bergman's genius for concise and meaningful organisation — so much ground has already been covered. It is but the first stage in the three climatic events of the story, from which the other two — the slaughter of the brothers and the appearance of the spring — logically follows. The parents' guilt is so far only that of desire: one can see the rape up to a point, as precipitated by the family situation with its unex-

¹ an alternative interpretation has been suggested here: the man, the most animal-like character in the film (not necessarily a moral condemnation) has given himself to Karin in a sense in which her first violater did *not*; and he kills her because, in rejecting her own animality, she is denying *him* as well.

pressed tensions and idealised (and hence the more dangerous) lust, but the parents' sense of guilt has yet to express itself directly. Before passing on to the murder, however, it is necessary to note two incidents of vital importance to the film development that occur during the rape sequence: the boy's experience of the toad and Ingeri's experience of the stove.

For the boy, the whole complex experience of witnessing the rape and the murder (he has even, it will be remembered, with typical child's cruelty, helped to catch the fleeing, panic-stricken Karin) is crystallized in the symbol of the toad. When left alone near the body, he picks up first the bread the toad was in, and flings it away in disgust, then takes up another piece of bread, but begins to vomit as soon as a morsel passes his lips. The discovery of the sinister and

horrible under what seemed so wholesome and pleasant—it is summed up for him by the toad. In Töre's home, when Töre repeats the grace Karin had recited in which bread from heaven becomes the bread of the body, he is unable to take in even a mouthful of food, the vomiting begins again: his simple trust in the goodness of life, which was also trust in the goodness of *himself*, has been undermined. The boy's taking of the guilt (in which in reality he played a negligible part) upon himself is one of the most moving things in the film.

For Ingeri, the chief significance of the rape lies in the stone she picks up to cast at the herdsmen and then slowly drops: it is her moment of realisation of the *reality* of her evil desires, which consciously were only a sort of play-acting. As she tells Töre later, she *couldn't* throw the stone: she was seeing what she wanted to see. And her whole personality is transformed by the experience: of all the characters in the film, Ingeri is the one nearest "salvation".

Between the rape and the murder "salvation" is explained explicitly

in religious terms in the speech of the farmhand to the boy, salvation being attainable only by passing through purgatory. And the only road to genuine purgation, Bergman insists, is self-realisation, and the understanding and acceptance of one's share in the general guilt. This is presented in the film as much as a psychological truth as an article of religious belief. There is no release for the characters until the smouldering evil within them has become fire.

We see Töre, before the murder, undergoing *false* purgation, self-imposed to work up a sense of self-righteousness in order to see himself as a just executioner. Extraordinary, how ready the critics have been to accept the characters at their own self-valuation—to accept the *picture* the characters present to themselves. Töre, in fact, in his self-flagellation, is duplicating his wife's behaviour with the hot wax, which he previously repudiated. With the revelation of his daughter's rape (from the blood on her dress) and murder, his own sense of guilt at his desire for her forces itself nearer the borderline of consciousness.

We have the extraordinary scene of the rape of the birch-tree. Two apparently contradictory interpretations are suggested by the visual handling of the scene; but our awareness of the confused state of Töre's psyche at this stage should make us prepared to accept apparent contradictions. He chooses an upright, isolated tree: a common phallic symbol. (Trees seem to be used elsewhere in the film for the same purpose: compare the huge horizontal trunk that sweeps down over Karin's dead body just after the rape, occupying the whole foreground of the picture). After violently uprooting the tree Töre falls forward on it with his legs wrapped round it and a look of exhausted relief on his face, closely paralleling the eldest brother in the rape scene (they are photographed from much the same angle). Symbolically, then, at different levels of his subconscious, Töre is simultaneously trying to uproot and indulging his sexual appetite for his

daughter. The rape of the tree and the ensuing *bastu* scene clearly hold particular significance for him: he uses his own sword to cut off the three birch-sprays (a symbolic deflowering—the number three commonly has sexual significance) with which he is to beat himself (pursuing the same apparent contradiction), and exchanges the sword for a butcher-knife before murdering the men.

The horror of Töre's "revenge" is in no way gratuitous. In killing the herdsmen Töre and his wife are trying to stamp out their own sense of guilt, hence the extreme brutality of the sequence. For Töre and Märeta the men are scapegoats: they, also, are guilty, which gives the pretext, but it is not for the sake of justice that they are slaughtered. Bergman presents them quite unequivocally as martyrs: the bodies are shown in the position of crucifixion, and one of them is burnt over the very fire that Ingeri blew up at the film's opening: the flames of evil have become the flames of purgatory.

The murder of the boy, which has aroused so much horrified protest, is necessary to the working-out of "salvation". The boy himself accepts it without protest, making little attempt to run away and not uttering a sound: he has seen the toad in the bread, and he accepts the judgment of the "wronged" father. The mother's attempt to save him is feeble in the extreme: passively, she half-connives at his death. Töre kills him, then steps back and sees for the first time the blood on his hands; he looks up at the one brother, hanging as if crucified from the wall; across at the other, lying, arms outstretched, over the fire; then down at the child (we don't see him, but he is made by the camera movements to seem *in between* the two men); and he says "God pardon me for what I have done." (Compare Christ's "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.") The child has died innocently for the salvation of others. His death cancels out the pseudo-uplift of the self-flagellation and makes Töre for the first time consciously doubt his moral position.

The film is in fact so much more terrifying than people have realised: which perhaps explains the wilful refusal to understand it. Far from pointlessly presenting an isolated bloody incident from the Middle Ages, it hits directly at every one of us. No one is innocent, the apparently "good", "noble", "pure" people often cause the greatest harm: we are all guilty, and "evil" is inherent in the very conditions of human life. As the "good" parents pass the stream on their way to Karin's body, the old man's raven caws ironically at them, its cry made to approximate very closely to the sound of laughter. The film is morally very subversive in its valuations, leading us to question all accepted values, all established morality. Bergman's appraisal of "the problem of evil" is profound and tragic and, in a sense, deeply pessimistic; yet he shows the road to salvation as the logical outcome of guilt.

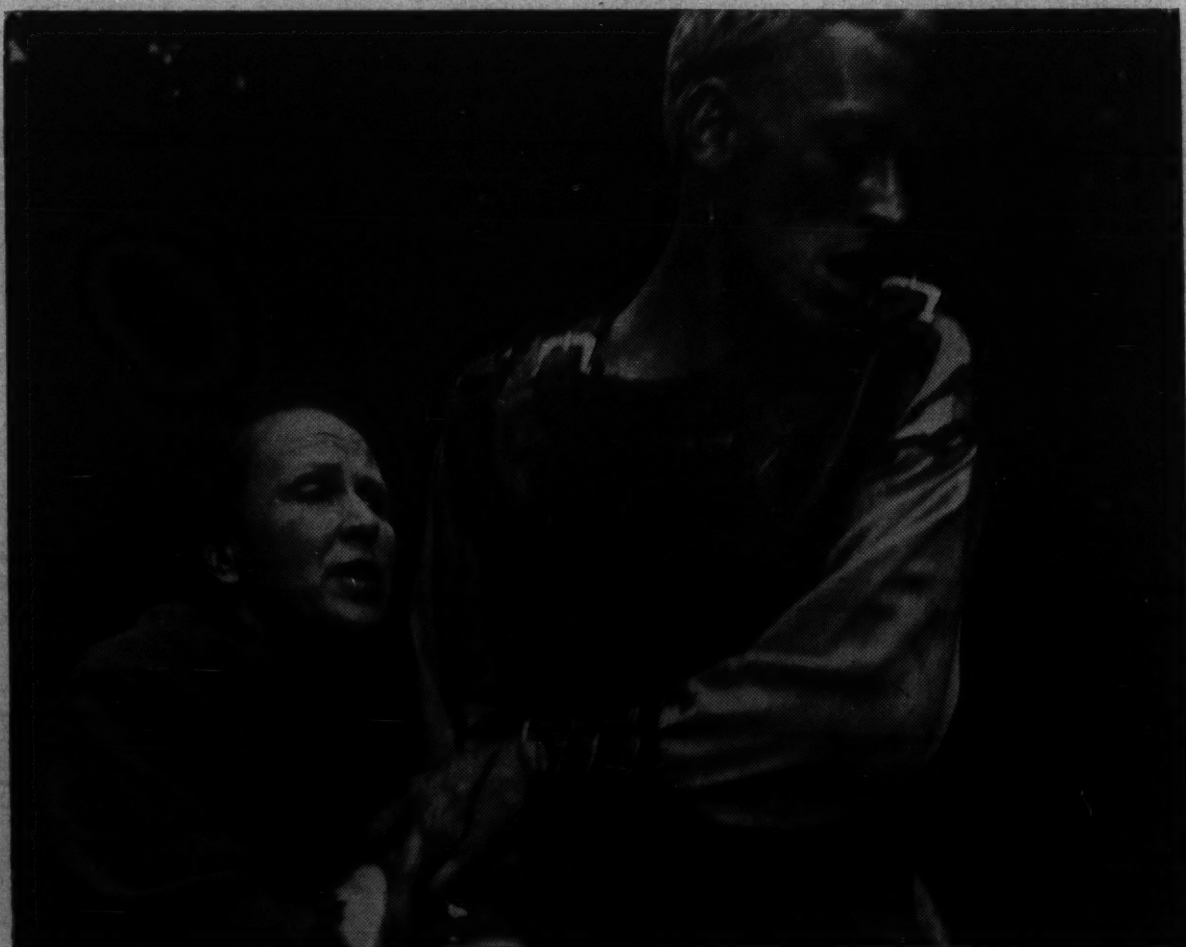
The purification ("purgatory") of Ingeri has, we have seen, already begun, with the dropping of the stone. In her, of all the leading characters, the evil was from the outset the most nearly conscious. She dissociates herself entirely from the murder of the herdsmen, taking the guilt upon herself and begging

Töre to kill her first. She is made very much the centre of the final tableau, and the positive, cathartic effect of the film depends on her at least as much as on Töre. It is perhaps a weakness of the film that the script does not allow Bergman to give Ingeri the prominence in the second half that one feels he would have liked her to have.

It is acknowledgement of the general guilt that brings forth the waters of life: self-knowledge, and the acceptance of the need to atone. His vision of the child as Christ brings home to Töre the monstrousness of the whole "revenge": he blames himself for "my revenge"; not merely for the death of the child. As to the *degree* of his self-realisation, the film is somewhat equivocal. His wife admits her jealousy to him, and he remarks enigmatically that she is not alone in her guilt; and, when he lays his hand on his dead daughter's hair and hip (duplicating the gesture of the eldest brother immediately after he killed her), he draws back, troubled. But his ideal image of himself has been shattered: it is enough. The anguished man of the film's close is a different person from the man who proudly represented himself to himself as an upright judge and execu-

tioner, placing himself on his "throne" before the dining-table as if presiding over a court session, striking his knife dramatically and peremptorily into the table (a gesture that, comically, awakens nobody). The water flows only after Töre's promise to build the church: the first time Karin's body is raised up by Märeta, nothing happens. In Töre the guilt has been, from the outset, the least conscious, the most deeply concealed. He has not reached full self-realisation, but his inherent strength and nobility makes his atonement take a healthy and positive form—an act of new creation, and a fantastically difficult one. (In Bergman's films, atonement by self-imposed, masochistic suffering is always repudiated—compare the flagellants in *The Seventh Seal* who are made to seem to vanish by dissolves, leaving only barren, stony ground). The "miracle" follows directly upon this promise of new creation, and springs from the place where his daughter died (from the spot where the back of her head, which received the fatal blow, lay). Only the daughter's death could have brought the release: so much is clear from the exposition of the situation at the start of the film: only her death could bring to consciousness, by devious and terrible means, the unexpressed guilts and suppressed desires of the other characters. We focus at the end on Ingeri, see her look of rapt wonder as she bathes in the spring as the natural outcome of the spiritual journey we have watched her making. And Ingeri, we remember, is the bearer of new life within her in the most literal as well as the spiritual sense.

This simplified account of a remarkably rich and complex work of art perhaps gives us a sufficiently clear idea of its moral and philosophical contents to form a valid valuation. And this must be, I suggest, high. Several Swedish friends have assured me that the dialogue is very bad, being banal and artificial. But the script of the film is of roughly equivalent importance to the libretto of an opera: the only question that is relevant is, Did this supply the direc-



tor with the basis he needed? A film script, like a libretto, need have no value as literature. Bergman certainly (to judge from Miss Isaksson's own account of what she was trying to do) seems to have found very much more in the script of "Jungfrukällan" than its author-ess was aware of having put there. The film has a marvellous rightness and economy: nowhere is there an irrelevant or misjudged detail (with the possible exception of the hymn-singing on the soundtrack at the end: silence, one feels, would have been more expressive). Bergman pursues the logic undeviatingly from the concise exposition of the various "guilts" to the gushing of the water, establishing every point visually with a mastery of the medium one would call virtuoso if

the word had not come to imply a gratuitous display of technique which is utterly foreign to his nature. Here every shot has been planned and executed to realise the complexities of the subject with maximum force and intensity. And what marvellous performances (as always) he gets from his players.

The sureness of Bergman's shaping and organising of his material, the inevitable rightness of each image, is the mark of a high order of creative genius. Of all the arts today, the cinema is that which most closely parallels the position of the drama in the Elizabethan age as the most vital and popular art form. And if Bergman is not quite the Shakespeare of the cinema, he is the nearest thing to it the cinema

has yet produced, with the possible exception of Kenji Mizoguchi. Few artistic developments have been as consistent and as moving to follow as Bergman's, from the moral and philosophical (and hence cinematic) confusions of "Fängelse" to the lucidity, sureness, and reasoned affirmation of the mature masterpieces. One looks forward with the keenest anticipation to "The Devil's Eye", his recently completed comedy on the Don Juan myth, and to "Samson i en Spegel" (As In a Mirror), which Bergman regards as the completion of a series of which *Wild Strawberries* and *The Virgin Spring* were the first two works. Its title suggests that it will also deal with the necessity for self-knowledge.

Robin Wood

A place for gold

How bent and irrelevant the businessmen and public relations officer can get is clearly demonstrated in the recent film directed by Basil Wright and put out by Goldsmiths Hall. It has probably done more damage to the craftsman's case in its gross distortion of the nature of his activity than the literature of the British Travel Association.

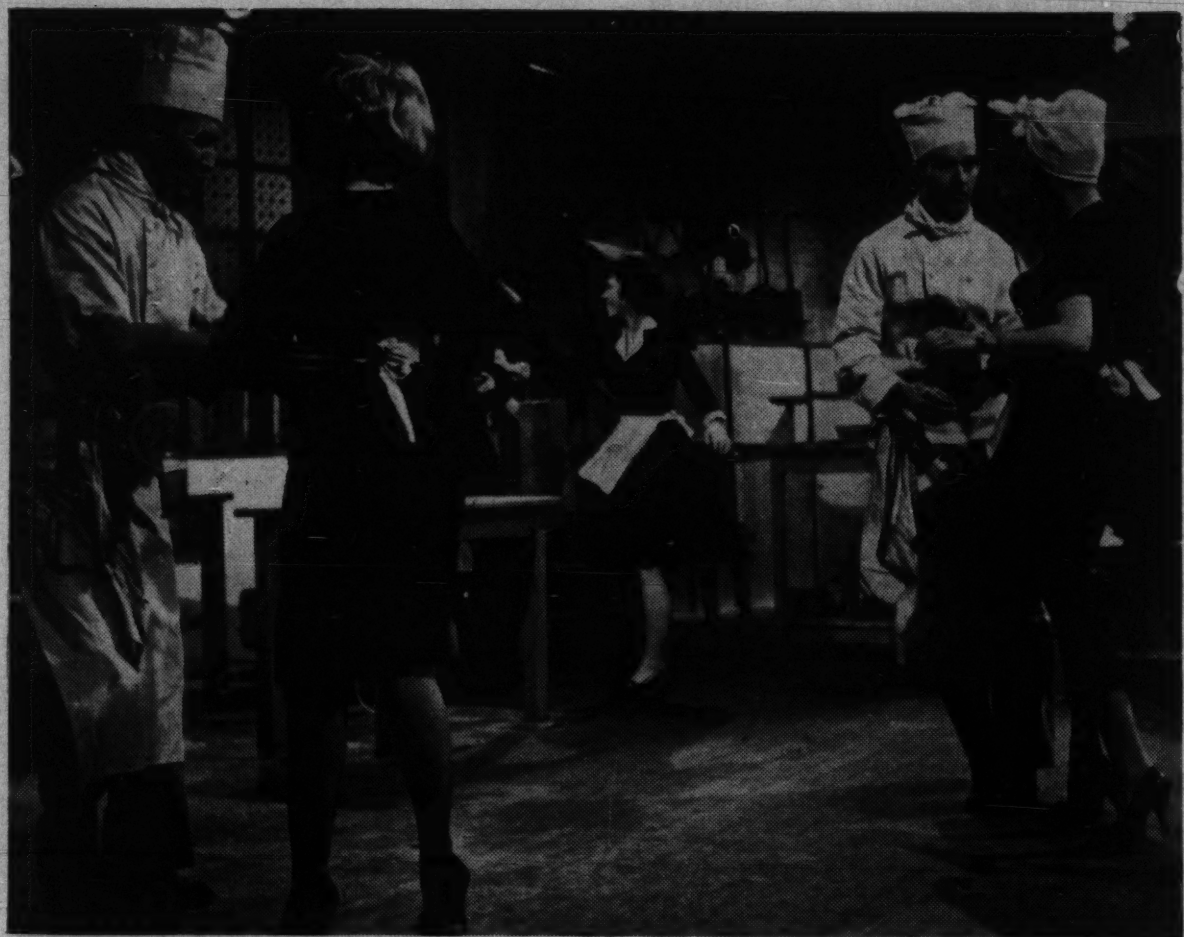
The art of the film is the art of moving images. This film is static-ridden from the start in keeping with the dignity of Goldsmith Hall. The film proceeds like a series of stills. It does not re-echo the exciting and vital rhythms of crafts activity in the way that a genuine crafts film such as *The Art of the Japanese Swordsmith* does. It made its premiere side by side with one of our few really worth while feature films, *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*. What an opportunity was missed to show a documentary of equal calibre in its own field of craftsmanship to an intelligent and thinking audience. Instead it merely provided a recession for a smoke

and "Kia Oro" and even at several points evoked derisive laughter. Such a moment was when the qualifying apprentice entering the marble halls for his initiation spoke the words "I made a teapot". He was obviously a sincere and talented young silversmith but was it necessary that he should be subjected to this indignity because of the over-anxiety of the producers of the film to impress us with the awe and reverence with which he held the Hall. Unfortunately the scene in which he was received into the presence of the elders did not endorse the status the hall was seeking. A groups of sleazy fuddy-duddies made self-conscious and uninspired remarks about the teapot such as "nicely balanced" in a room seedily furnished according to the canons of conspicuous waste. Throughout the film we were subjected to shots of chandeliers, roses and marble pillars. (Someone had not read Veblen.) The music accompanying the film was of course of appropriate sentimental grandeur. I have a recollection that at

one point it even reached the nadir of the Cecile B. de Mille heavenly choir.

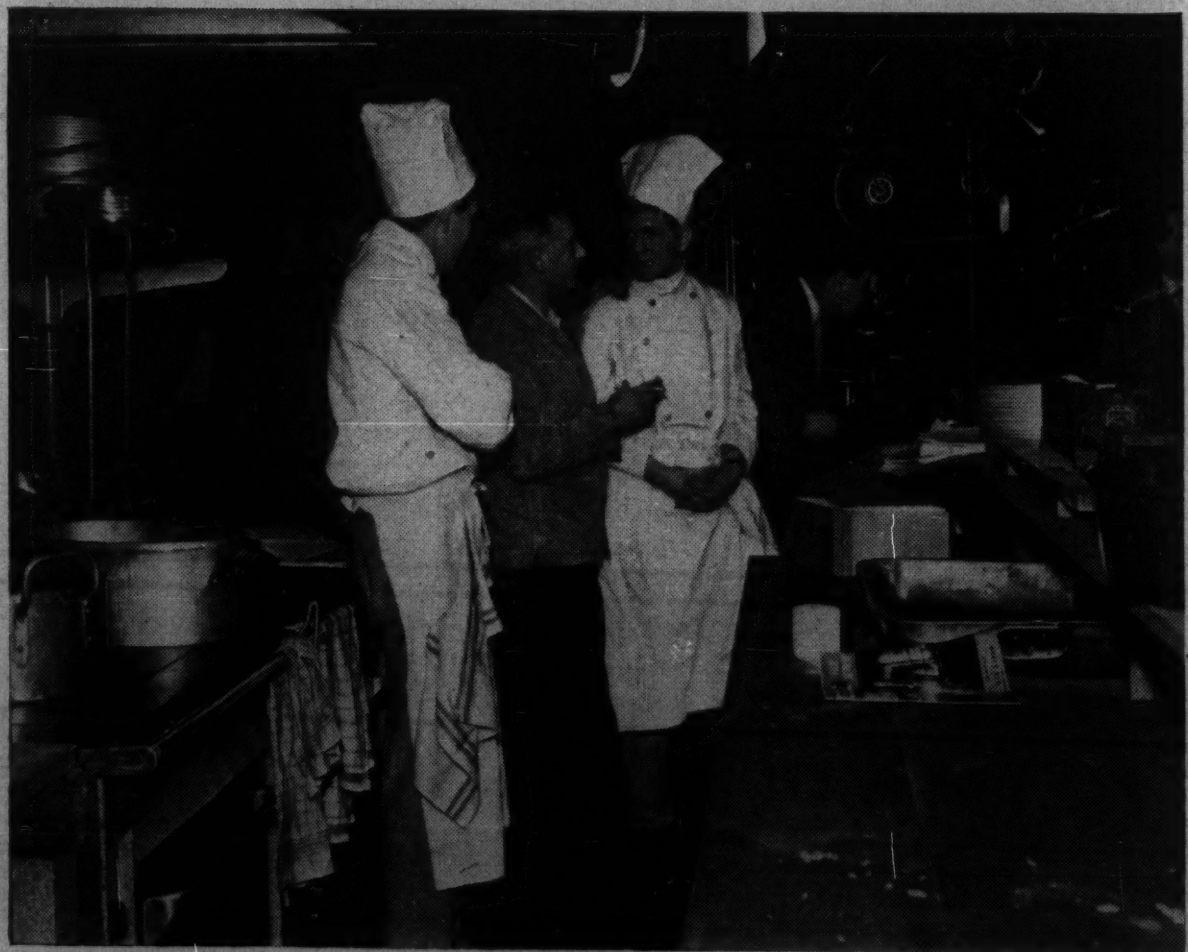
A variety of pieces of work were held up for us to admire and the name of the maker proudly enunciated. They were without exception ornate and extravagant abortions. Only three pieces of silver of any merit were shown. One was the teapot made by the apprentice, the other was a piece taken out of a bog in Ireland — which was passed over hastily — and the other a piece being worked by the silversmith Gerald Benny. Gerald Benny is one of our most creative and alive artist silversmiths, but the audience hardly got that impression from the dead phlegmatic way in which the process of his making the piece was filmed. The audience was left with the impression that British craftsmen were not so much concerned with producing works of art as seeking a squalid divinity.

Murray Fieldhouse
(Murray Fieldhouse is editor of the *Crafts Review*)



*Director James Hill,
Actor Carl Mohner and
Writer Arnold Wesker,
discuss a detail of
kitchen procedure.*

*Tom Bell as Paul,
Fanny Carby as Winnie and
Howard Greene as Raymond
A rock-'n-roll session
during a slack period.*



*Brian Phelan as Kevin
Director James Hill and
Scot Finch as Hans.
Preparing for the next
shot on the kitchen set.*

*Carl Mohner as Peter
Nerves become frayed, and
tempers short as the heat
and the pressure of work
rise to a climax.*

The Kitchen

The Kitchen, a screen version of the play by Arnold Wesker, was recently completed at Shepperton Studios by A.C.T. Films, the production unit of the Association of Cinematograph, Television and Allied Technicians. The adaptation was the work of Sidney Cole, who was also the producer. The director, James Hill, has hitherto worked in documentary, and is best known for *Giuseppina*, which he made for B.P. Films.

We understand that the making of *The Kitchen* was marked by an unusual degree of enthusiasm and

co-operation on the parts of all concerned; and we hope in the next issue of *Definition* to include an article by Arnold Wesker on this and other aspects of the production. Not having seen the finished film, we are unable to comment upon its worth; but at all events, it encouraging to see the Union's own unit again embarking upon such a responsible project. Let us hope that the experiment of *The Man Upstairs* will not be repeated, and that *The Kitchen* will not be robbed of whatever recognition it may deserve by an indifference amounting almost to sabotage.



Not only the big bad Renter, not only the wicked Exhibitor, but we, the film makers are to blame for the dreary second features and inadequate "bread and butter" firsts. Our attitude has been altogether too negative.

We, indeed, are the fellows who flock to have ourselves fitted for Andrew Singer's strait jacket (Definition No. 2). None of us disagrees with the gist of Singer's thesis. Lewis Carroll and Kafka might well have designed the structure of our industry.

One of us is waiting for you now in a Wardour Street pub—waiting for you to buy him a drink in return for our oldest cliché: the one about how you don't have to be mad to be in films, but it helps.

This is where we fail. We're blind. It's not a strait jacket we are measured for: it's a corset, it pinches: it moulds us mercilessly—but it's only a pair of stays, Grandma: our hands are free. And our heads.

We might prefer to frolic naked through the Elysian Fields—or the Champs Elysées, Paris, France—but we are part of an Entertainment Industry and part of a British Popular Art.

So we must wear these corsets: such cute, such elastic corsets, too. I must add—if only to flog this exhausted metaphor to death.

We dream too much of those Elysian Fields where Cinema is Free. We consider our own workaday Wardour Street a sordid thoroughfare that permits us to make nothing but shoddy goods for sale, goods quite unworthy of our soaring souls.

Then so we struggle to manufacture precisely these goods because we've got to live. (Why? asks our man in the Wardour Street pub. He can't help it.)

True we make them very well for the money and time allowed. We don't cheat. We work hard. But they

are not the films we would really like to make. They could be. What we need to do is to cure ourselves of all that transatlantic schizophrenia (such an American disease, old boy—I mean, Man) and wallow in our natural British Megomania.

We might then see ourselves whole in all our horror and glory instead of splitting ourselves each into two men—the breadwinner who tries to massproduce and the would-be tenant of an almost unattainable ivory tower.

Even if we merely boiled our pots with a little more spice matters would begin to improve. There is nothing to stop us and we could go further still. For nearly every second feature subject contains in its elementary plot a hundred chances for us to display our talents, a dozen to depict our deeper thoughts.

Such films can be splendid frameworks for philosophy, for political ideas, for tenderness, for love—for anything we particularly cherish—without destroying their surface values or their popularity.

If we feel anything at all, in fact, a reasonable preoccupation with the obvious framework leaves our subconscious free to put across our messages in the only way they will get across.

But, alas, we usually content ourselves with nothing more than the bare framework we have contracted to provide, giving our frustrations a sop, perhaps, by including a technical trick or two.

Our major blunder—the whole trades major blunder—lies in paying too little attention to the script. Vital though it is to choose the right subject (and the choice is vast) in the context of cheaper films especially it is even more essential to concentrate time and thought on scripting and preparation.

At this stage we can add that five per cent. of inspiration rather than trying to hoard it in the leaky vaults of our brains against the hoped-for

day when the perfect subject can be made in perfect conditions.

Perspiration, God knows, all ninety five per cent., is with us already. Here, indeed, at the scripting stage is where we can add ourselves.

Instead, all too often, we withdraw our little selves and, like ha virgins, keep our maidenhood theoretically intact for the big chance that some angel Distributor may present us with one day.

Let us size our opportunities—even 15,000 opportunities—and use them for our own ends rather than succumb to the strait jacket and allow such opportunities—and the opportunists who offer them—to use us.

How can we do this?

Each according to his abilities and chances—but I add a Poor Man's Guide to provoke film makers:

1. Try the 16mm. Camera and bunch of friends to help you. There is a vague chance that this approach might work: if you make certain work with an exaggeratedly professional attitude, preparing your script and framing your shots with style and originality. Nowadays only really well established first feature directors can afford to be amateurs.

At the worst you may at least discover whether our communal art is really for you—or whether you would be wiser to lock yourself up in a penthouse and paint pictures or write poems.

Snags? Apart from talent, expensive and bottomless patience with foot you will need a little money (£100-£1,000), help from the B.F.I., a sponsor, or an angel.

2. Try the Industrial world. If you consider your sponsor a patron and he considers you an advertising contractor, you will never let him forget that the Soft Sell, really well done, may win him a worldwide audience. Many feature directors started this way. At worst you will be putting in practice under ranc

ess harrowing conditions and at an earlier age than you would be likely to achieve in a second feature.

Try Television. Chances of swift promotion are greater. Within a few years you can put in the equivalent of decades of practice in handling actors and making rapid decisions about camera angles. Then with luck and talent—if you still want to—you step across into films. The possibilities of interchange between these mediums is likely to increase with the years. Excellent directing experience can also be gained from filmed television scenes—if you can land the job.

You still want to set up your own feature film? Then avoid giving any impression of expecting "No" or an answer. Believe—with an effort of will, if necessary—in the subject you are trying to sell. Perhaps all hopeful directors, writers and producers should take lessons in Conmanship. In any case we must learn to reconcile our sensitivity with a reasonable brashness—not so much about ourselves as about our subjects. Don't be too modest about them. Experts are waiting to knock them.

If—as for beginners is more likely—you allow someone to sell you a subject take even greater pains to discover and accept its possibilities. Work like crazy to develop such potentialities, putting Enthusiasm, sincerity and sweat may not be enough but they tend to be infectious and in our cooperative

form of expression they go a hell of a long way. Our ever-elusive one per cent. of inspiration generally flourishes in well tilled ground.

6. According to Stanley Kubrick (in the "Observer") you can buy time by accepting a Star—if you are already fashionable enough a Director for the Star to accept you. In other words it is not in our Stars Dear Kubrick, but in ourselves that we are underlings. And if we accept the formula we must make a watertight contract when we thus sell our souls for time. Otherwise we will have bought a large number of unwanted fringe benefits—such as endless advice on scripting and casting. We can surely organize ourselves at the scripting stage to do without those long scheduled months which may so easily become sheer boredom to the actors and technicians, apart from steamrolling all wit and style flat out of the final film.

7. Above all we must find ways to cooperate with each other instead of hiding ourselves away in corners jealously clutching our own little ideas to our breasts. Maybe Hollywood in its several heydays, or France's Nouvelle Vague, or even Ealing Studios at its height suffered certain inbred claustrophobic disadvantages. Maybe the continental habit of meeting in certain cafés can lead to too little action and too much talk. But such dangers always sort themselves out all too soon by the more fission potential of any group of film personalities. Our present British pattern of utter separation, dispersal and ignorant

competition — is — like lead poisoning — a slow and unsatisfactory method of suicide.

Cooperation and an exchange not only of ideas and experience but of chances and jobs would at least save us all from hanging separately.

So many different organizations might help — do — help: the B.F.P.A., the F.B.F.M., the S.F.T.A., the B.F.I., the N.F.F.C., the Feature Producers' and Directors' Section of the A.C.T.T., the A.C.T. Film company itself — all make contributions. But these are made in such separate and sometimes antagonistic vacuums that the status quo (shrinking pattern) is preserved intact.

A new kind of F.I.D.O. (with positive rather than anti-Telly objectives) might help — but it is up to the younger-minded writers, producers, directors, publicists, distributors and exhibitors to form their own cooperative. Films thus written, produced, directed and sold to the public with intelligence, originality and hard work can still make new stars and good profits — as well as setting their own new fashions—for a comparatively small outlay.

If the circuits help by abolishing Second Features, as such, and by handing out standard contracts based on merit rather than cost, there is still time to break through our tired and cynical present attitude to a livelier future.

Bob Dunar

Getting it out

gramme of up to two and a half hours. There should not be any screen advertising and where possible programmes should be bookable like the theatre and not continuous.

There is room at present in the

U.K. for roughly one hundred of this type of cinema over and above the present number that are showing specialised films. Can these cinemas be a good financial investment? I believe they can. Experience shows that films such as *Wild Strawberries*... *Kanal*...

Inside the straitjacket

I believe that a new type of cinema is required for the showing of specialised films. This should be a five or six hundred seater, comfortable but not ostentatious. It should show a programme composed of a feature film and two or three short subjects, say a pro-

Ashes and Diamonds... *The Savage Eye* etc. do well wherever they are shown. The only short-coming is that there are not enough cinemas available for the showing of this type of film. Many of the existing cinemas that show these films do a poor publicity job or none at all and sandwich the films in between some 'X' Sex, 'or Horror film so that few people are aware that a quality film has been shown until after the week's showing is over.

It is now possible, especially in the larger cities and suburbs to keep a good programme running for several weeks. This enables a small cinema to cope with a large audience, do a better publicity job, and by bringing in greater returns to encourage the producer and distributor to make available more such films.

An aspect of the opening of new modern cinemas is the need for at least two or three additional first run cinemas in the West End of London.

At present moment outside of the Academy Cinema there are few West End cinemas that will open a foreign film on merit alone. Usually the specialised West End cinemas require a film to have some gimmick, generally Sex, Nudism or Horror.

Because of the long runs that many specialised films are now having a first run cinema can usually play not more than five or six films a year. This therefore means that many outstanding films made throughout the world can have no chance of showing in this country until this situation has changed. One may well ask why is it necessary to open every film in the West End; the circuit films do not require this. The answer is very simple; because foreign films do not go into the circuits they need press film critics' reports. These can only be obtained if the film has a West End opening. Although most of the critics are very co-operative on the release of good specialised films, they will not write up a film

unless it is planned to open in the West End.

The second reason for the West End opening is the higher per capita returns from the audience by virtue of the higher admission prices, and also the long run. This enables the distributor to recover a large part of his outlay in the purchase of the film and the various expenses involved, making the English Version, censorship, publicity etc.

Whilst over the past ten years the audience for the popular or English speaking film has been cut in half, the audience for the foreign or specialised film has been slowly increasing. Exhibitors who have had several popular cinemas and opened up a specialised cinema as an experiment now find that the specialised cinema is their bread and butter and the ordinary cinemas a liability. This is the general trend. Because T.V. has taken over from films and has become the popular medium of entertainment this decline in revenues has forced a cut back in production which in turn produced a general lowering in film quality, and this has brought a further loss in cinema attendance.

This situation largely applies to the domestic (U.S.) product but not to the foreign films. Whilst there has never been a mass audience in this country for foreign films, good foreign films today are not losing their audience. It is an audience that is gradually increasing in this country and varies in each case according to the quality of the films presented. All signs show an improving quality in all countries now developing film industries.

There are now more than 40 countries producing films. In selecting the best films from each country each year it seems unquestioned that the general quality must be superior to that of the domestic product which includes all the good, bad or indifferent films.

Of course if the exhibition of foreign films is to survive and develop in this country the films have to be of a very high calibre, otherwise what incentive is there for

people to see films in a foreign language with English subtitles? Whilst the audience for foreign films therefore is on the increase the difficulty of breaking through and obtaining adequate screen time for these films is doing considerable harm.

At the present time 70% of our screen time goes to American films, 24% to British-U.S. co-productions, and 6% is left over for foreign films. Out of the 6% left probably 4% is used for foreign salacious and horror films leaving perhaps 2% for the good foreign films.

The fact that there is so little time allocated on our screens for the foreign film places us at a great disadvantage in selling British films to countries abroad. Many countries to-day are practising reciprocity in films. They will only buy British films if we will purchase their films.

For domestic production the addition of one hundred specialised cinemas would be a great boon. There would be created an opening for the showing of British made documentaries which at present is almost non-existent in view of the present situation of double feature programmes that exists in most of Britain's cinemas.

Not only would there be an outlet for British Documentary and a chance of regaining production costs from the home market, but there would also be the opportunity of training a generation of serious British film workers which today in the present situation is sadly lacking.

The addition of one hundred specialised cinemas over and above the 70 or 80 now showing specialised films could also cover the cost of low budget British productions and so enable small independent production units to function, units that may have more initiative and ideas than the major companies now producing.

Charles Cooper

(Charles Cooper is managing director of Contemporary Films)

We all know, of course, that there is no such person as *the* Censor. The B.B.F.C. comprises a small group of men, none of whom feels he should be held personally responsible for decisions made by the Board as a whole; and even Mr. Traveleyan, the Secretary, will resort to this argument when cornered. Nevertheless it is customary to speak of "the Censor" in everyday parlance; and to relieve the feeling of disorientation which can result from talking about someone whom one knows to be non-existent, let us try to build up a working image of this gentleman's personality and looks.

The professed intention of the Censor is to eliminate from films only such scenes as might give offence to reasonable people. Well, possibly I am not a reasonable person: but I must confess to having found much that is offensive in films released with the unconditional blessing of the U certificate. In *Killers of Kilimanjaro*, for example, an episode occurs in which Anne Aubrey, bare-footed and sheathed in a sari, leans on a post draped with her own undies and watches rapily as three native girls struggle to pull off Anthony Newley's underpants, Robert Taylor eyeing her lasciviously up and down amid the giggles. Bare description cannot do justice to the full obscenity of this passage as it appears on the screen; but for sheer suggestive nastiness it seems to me unequalled by anything even in *Doctor in Love* or *The French Mistress*. I do not wish to imply that such scenes should be banned. Censorship is too presumptuous and dangerous a practice. But when we consider the mentality of a Censor who can pass over such material whilst demanding the deletion of the love-making sequence from *Les Amants*, it becomes obvious that he is the tacit guardian of all that is corrupt and hypocritical in the sexual morality of our time. His emblems should therefore be the bowler hat and umbrella.

is the principle underlying the idea that things should be censored at all. No-one could claim that there is any immorality involved in seeing images presented on a screen: the immorality, if any, will consist in the way we choose to modify our values as a result of the screen experience; and criminal behaviour may well be chosen on the basis of sequences which are not overtly criminal "in themselves." For example, as long as the delights of wealth and power continue to be portrayed in the cinema, there is a chance that violent attitudes may be aroused in the minds of some viewers: for as Lawrence Lipton has pointed out (in *The Holy Barbarians*), the juvenile delinquent is not at variance with the values of our society; he accepts the material rewards of the Opportunity State, and is simply dissatisfied with the speed at which he can get them. No precautions can be taken against this. Each person must ultimately be allowed responsibility for his own moral decisions; and we have no right to try and withhold from him the experiences on the basis of which his decisions must be made. But the voice of the Censor takes on at this point a ring which may sound familiar. It has often been argued that democracy should be abandoned, since the average man has developed neither the intelligence nor the political awareness which would qualify him to pass judgment on matters of State. Those who maintain this position are not necessarily mistaken in their factual assertions; they have simply missed the point of democracy. For the answer to their arguments is not that the average man does possess the desirable knowledge of politics, economics and statecraft, but that democracy is the only means by which he can protect himself from those who do. Most of us would now agree that each person has the right to defend himself against exploitation, and that this means in practice not only the nominal right of ballot, but also the right of access to all the facts necessary for him to arrive at a realistic judgment.

Similarly we must say in the field of art — which is that of human experience "in depth"—not merely that each man has the right to choose what he shall see and hear, but—far more important—that each man has a right to choose his own moral position on the basis of the fullest human data that his fellow-men can put at his disposal.

But just as some people have missed the point of democracy, so the Censor appears to have missed the point of morality. His garb must therefore include the periwig of the 18th century aristocrat.

We have seen that the Censor's mind can effect a curious transference—the transference of immorality from behaviour seen to the neutral act of seeing it. Another form of transference seems to be involved in his dealings with episodes of violence in works of a documentary or near-documentary character. What can have been his purpose, for example when he ordered the deletion of over 650 feet from the film *Bullfight*—material showing men and horses being tossed and gored, and bulls summarily killed—so that bullfighting became transfigured into an innocuous and quite unexceptionable sport? It is just possible that the Censor is a secret *aficionado* and was trying to pull a fast one over the R.S.P.C.A. But as this suggestion is perhaps uncharitable, we shall accept the alternative. The Censor evidently believes that by removing the death of a bull from a film he is saving an actual bull from the matador; that by removing the death of a woman in the gas chamber he is sparing an actual woman from this suffering—and so on with realistic portrayals of rape and of butchery in the battlefield. Such failure to distinguish between image and reality, such transference of value from the symbol to the fact, is called sympathetic magic. We must therefore add to the Censor's regalia the grass skirt and mask of the tribal witch-doctor.

DAI VAUGHAN

Mother Joan of Angels

Mother Joan of Angels by Jerzy Kawalerowicz, Poland's entry for this year's Cannes Film Festival has brought forward from the Polish critics a chorus of praise at least equal in volume to that which greeted Wajda's *Ashes and Diamonds*. The script, by Kawalerowicz and Konwicki — the man who made *Last Day of a Summer* — was freely adapted from a story by J. Iwaszkiewicz, inspired in its turn by the same XVII century Loudun incident on which Aldous Huxley based his novel and John Whiting his new play "The Devils". The film purports to show the whole process by which human imagination is made to breed images of evil, terrifyingly real.

Kawalerowicz, in films like *Shadow*, *The Real End of the Great War* and *Night Train*, has proved himself to be a most resourceful director, with ability to solve any cinematic problem brilliantly. It seemed, however, that command over the medium became for him an end in itself. It remains to be seen, whether in *Mother Joan*... he has finally made a truly personal statement, or produced just another effective exercise in style.



The Polish Experiment

Presenting this short and unavoidably incomplete account of the film production set-up in Poland, we do not seriously consider it a practical model to follow in this country. It could not be applied within our blessed economy. But it can still serve as a landmark, to keep our sense of direction sharp. Only through comparisons we can see our own system against a firm background, effect a proper detachment from it and recognize the absurdities as such.

During the years now known as the Stalinist period, before 1955, the system of film production in Poland was definitely top heavy. The whole field was managed by The Central Board of Film Production, to whom film makers and studio personnel were directly responsible. The Board's Script Department planned production thematically, supervised the actual writing of the screen-play, chose the technical crew and cast the film. When the shooting stage was reached the control passed over to the Production Department of the Board. The defects of this system are too obvious to need elaborating. Not only did the initiative lie entirely in the hands of administration, i.e. the party, but the volume of production was low and its costs high. During the 1946-1951 period, average production did not exceed 4 features a year; in 1951-1955 this was increased to 7 a year. In 1957, when the experimental, decentralised system was operating, 13 Polish feature films were released (without a corresponding increase in studio space); in 1959 — 19 and in 1960 — 21. At the same time an appreciable cut in production costs was achieved. In 1955 the budget for a Black & White feature varied from 5,858,000 zlotys to 8,047,000 zlotys; the corresponding figures for

1959 are from 3,964,000 zlotys to 7,036,000 zlotys. And certainly, the 'production values' of Polish films did not suffer by this economy.

The experiment was first decided on in 1955. Its main direction was to transfer the initiative from the administration to the people engaged creatively in film production. Six separate 'Film Authors' Groups' were set up, to be later expanded to eight. As a rule a well-known film director (in one case a screen-writer) is appointed as the head of each autonomous unit. He has two close advisers to help him: a literary director, usually a writer, who through his personal contacts scans the country for possible screen material; and a production manager, who deals with budgeting problems. At their best the Groups develop distinct artistic personalities, and this is always encouraged. The film directors working within the Group should sympathise with each other's artistic aims. When this becomes, perhaps, difficult — after all, artists, individually and in groups, do change and develop — a transfer to a different unit is possible. Thus Andrzej Munk, who originally worked with Wajda and Kawalerowicz in a 'Kadr' Group (kadr means — a frame), later moved to the 'Kamera' Group.

Graduates of the Lodz Film School are immediately accepted and absorbed into the Groups. In fact, they are in close touch with the industry even during studies. They often do odd jobs in units during summer recess, and each potential director has 'a patron' among active film-directors. And anyway, the industry is at the moment clearly dominated by the Lodz 'old boys'. All this makes transition from the School into the industry a smooth and almost automatic process. Having graduated, a young

film-maker has to serve a few years apprenticeship as an assistant (to a director, a cameraman, or an art-director — depending on his speciality). The head of a Group decides when he is ready to undertake a responsible job independently. Usually when a young assistant-director gets hold of a really promising script he is allowed to direct it himself, perhaps with some help and advice from his older colleagues. It seems worth mentioning that out of 80 features produced in years 1956-1960, 24 were debuts by young directors.

The trial period for the new Polish system lasted from 1956 to 1959. In that time Film Authors' Groups were not economically independent. This aspect of the industry was still managed centrally. The situation was reviewed in 1959: The experiment was pronounced generally successful, and its extension and consolidation recommended. The Groups were then made to assume direct economic responsibility for their new production. A sum, covering an approved budget, is credited by the National Bank, to be paid back later out of the takings. This arrangement is now at a trial stage and has not yet been accepted as permanent.

Unavoidably, some restrictions remain. Every production comes up twice for approval by the higher authority: firstly when the screen-play is finished, and a Committee composed of artistic and literary directors of all Groups, some film critics, writers and people otherwise active in cultural field read and appraise it. The Committee is an advisory body; and a final decision to accept or reject the script is taken on its recommendation by a head of a cinema department in a ministry of Culture and Art. Once this obstacle is overcome, the director has complete freedom in casting his film

and in shooting and editing it. The only attention and advice he is likely to get at this stage will come from the Group's artistic director, who is, after all, a colleague, and often a close friend. A finished product comes up again before the same or a similar Committee, and the film's achievement and suitability is then finally judged.

The system of payment seems fairly complicated, and we are not able to set it out in any detail. A director can get up to about 160,000 zlotys for a moderately successful film. (It is extremely difficult to translate this sum into English money. The official rate of exchange — 67 zlotys to a pound, and a black market one — 250-300 zlotys to a pound, are both equally unrealistic. A rate of about 100 zlotys to a pound would be nearer the truth.) Part of the sum consists of a basic salary, the rest of an 'artistic' and an 'economic' premium, the first being paid when the completed film has been judged and accepted for release, the second some time after release. There is also an additional bonus, paid when the film is released. These premiums are shared, according to some approved scale, among all people concerned in the production. Even the composer gets his cut. The artistic and the economic premiums often tend to even each other out: a popular farce of

the 'Anatol' series (a distant parallel of the British 'Carry on' series) would get a high economic premium but a low artistic one, or even none at all; this would be reversed in a case of a film like *Eroica*, which did fairly well on release but never broke any box-office records. Thus ambition is encouraged, even when it becomes commercially risky.

The Polish system, as all good systems, seems fluid enough; and a lot depends on how the government chooses to interpret it. It can be argued that allowance has been made for a measure of political control over the production. But the results show clearly that this control, though no doubt restricting, is less crippling and considerably more superficial than the pressure of commercial interests in this country. In 1960 three Polish features run into trouble when presented for the final approval: Andrzej Munk's *Crosseyed Luck*, Andrzej Wajda's *Innocent Sorcerers* and Kazimierz Kutz's *No One Cries Out*. *Crosseyed Luck* was subsequently released with minor changes in its last episode; the other two were shelved, as it appeared, for an indefinite period, but released, after discussions and arguments, a few months later. All three of them, and especially *Crosseyed Luck* and *Innocent Sorcerers* enjoyed a considerable critical success.

Even taking into account an occasional interference, the Polish experiment seems to be working out extremely well. At the end of 1960 a well-known and fairly responsible film-critic attempted to sum up the year's feature output. He divided new releases roughly into three categories: he found 5 to be below average, 5 average (including *See You To-morrow*, well liked by some English critics) and the remaining 10 — above average. By 'above average' he probably understood works serious in intention and done with a great deal of real skill, whether or not one finds them, on a final analysis, successful. Putting it more clearly, every second film produced in Poland in 1960 appeared worthy of a serious critical attention. It is difficult to think of another film industry with a comparable record. This high level of ambition seems finally of more value than one or two widely acclaimed, spectacular successes. And commercially Polish films stand well in a home market to the foreign features, which are usually well dubbed.

Boleslaw Su

(We are indebted to Miss Iwona Polak of the United Film Authors Groups for part of the information on which this article was based.)

The Return of the Old Guard

The Louis Delluc Prize was first established in 1937. It is often referred to as the Goncourt of the cinema. Though probably a more academic jury than the Goncourt Jury, the Delluc choices have often been happy — prize winners include Renoir's *Les Bas Fonds*, Carne's *Quai des Brumes*, Malraux's *L'Espoir*, Becker's *Rendez Vous de Juillet* and Tati's *Les Vacances de M. Hulot* — and the choice has sometimes helped to renew the French cinema.

This year among more than thirty films proposed, the jury selected Henri Colpi's *Une Aussi Longue Absence*. The cast is headed by Alida Valli and George Wilson, a theatre actor of some renown who has played in Brecht, Sophocles and Moliere at the Theatre National Populaire.

The script is credited to Marguerite Duras and Gerard Jarlot and is one of the main obstacles to really liking the film. For those who liked *Hiroshima, Mon Amour*

New French Film Production

in spite of Marguerite Duras, for those who felt in spite of anything that Alain Resnais might say that *Hiroshima* would have been much better without Duras, for those the trademarks of her style seem even more insufferable in Colpi's film. Her phrasing, the rhythms of the phrases are so like *Hiroshima* that this time they are almost impossible to accept. When you hear sentences like "Heureuse un jour a Chaulieu" you cannot help but hear Emmanuela Riva say "Foll

jour a Nevers". The film is an essay on memory and forgetfulness, a regret for a happy love that no longer exists. Henri Colpi, whose first film this as a director is not a name well known to the general public, but his name is a familiar one in the French cinema. He has in the past few years become one of the best French editors and has been associated with some of the most interesting ventures in the cinema. He has worked on most of Alain Resnais's films, particularly *Hiroshima*, *Mon Amour* and *Nuit et Jour*; other films Colpi edited include Chaplin's *King in New York* and Agnes Varda's *Pointe Courte*. Colpi seems, in fact, to have worked on almost every film

that has contributed something genuinely new to the "New French Cinema". Excellent direction of actors, a classical simplicity, remarkable editing by Jasmine Chasney (Colpi's usual assistant) make this film, in spite of its defects a film that will long be remembered.

Otherwise French film production in 1960 has primarily been marked by the return of the 'Old Wave'. Clouzot, Cayatte, Carne, Allegret, and Autant Lara have all come out with new films to prove to the aggressive youngsters that they too are part of the French cinema. In the meantime the younger members of the corporation have shown no wish to retire and 1960 saw 43 first films made as against 24 in 1959. But this increase in quantity

hardly corresponds to an increase in quality. Against the names of Resnais, Truffaut and Godard who made their first films in 1959, in 1960 we have Jean Paul Sassy's *Le Peau et les Os*, Jacques Demy's *Lola* and Colpi's film.

In the first months of 1961, film production can be divided into three main categories:

(1) What has pleasantly been called 'Daddy's cinema'. That is, the so called French quality film, highly praised fifteen years ago. Some of the 'old masters' still think it worth doing well made films, which need have neither too much intelligence, nor bring anything new to the cinema as long as Jean Gabin or Brigitte Bardot or one of the other sacred monsters

Alida Valli in Henri Colpi's "Une Aussi Longue Absence."



whose names alone are box office guarantees appear in them. To this category belongs Clouzot's *La Verité*, Jean Gabin's latest film, *Le President* — which tells the story of a famous ex-French Prime Minister and his political career and Jean Delannoy's *La Princesse de Cleves*, an adaptation of a classical 17th Century novel.

(2) Each man's personal *Quatre Cents Coups*. This doesn't necessarily mean a young director's autobiographical film, but a serious film in which the director deals with a theme he has long cherished, and in which he expresses some of his attitudes to life. In this category belong *Une Aussi Longue Absence* and Jacques Demy's *Lola*, a fascinating story, in which Lola (Anouk Aimee in an unusual role for her) is a girl dancing in a cheap harbour night club. Her lives and adventures are re-lived by several other characters; a fourteen year old girl who lives her first love as Lola lived it once, a woman in her forties who is abandoned as she once was, etc.

Among others are Armand Gatti's *L'Enclos*, a brutal story of a concentration camp, which touches

on themes of friendship and communication between men and Pierre Kast's *La Morte Saison des Amours*, another brilliant essay by the author of "Le Bel Age" on the relationship between men and women.

(3) The third group might be called the remnants of the New Wave. These are films made by young — and not so young — men whose life is a mixture of pretty girls, good scotch and fast sports cars. And so are their films. They are not necessarily bad films but they hardly bring anything fresh to the cinema. Michel Deville's *Ce Spur ou Jamais*, a pleasant divertimento on flirts, acting and love, and Jacques Doniol-Valcroze's *Coeur Battant* belong to this category.

Most typical of the category are three films released in France at the same time, *La Recreation* by François Moreuil with Jean Seberg, Françoise Prevost and Christian Marquand; *Les Grandes Personnes* by Jean Valere with Jean Seberg, Micheline Presle and Maurice Ronet; *L'amant de Cinq Jours* by Phillipe de Broca with Jean Seberg,

Jean Pierre-Cassel, and Micheline Presles. They not only have the same stars but tell the same story of a little girl (who happens to be American — because of Jean Seberg's accent) who wants to play adult games with grown ups and gets hurt in the process. Love is always impossible in this world of great wealth, fast cars and witty dialogue.

The public hasn't responded well to these stories of golden youth. It has a tendency to go back, if judged by box-office results, to the less bold more academic productions; *La Verité*, *Le Passage du Rhin* (the last Venice Festival strange selection), *Les Vieux de la Vieille* (with Pierre Fresnay) being top of the income list.

The critics and jury members, however, had tended to select films which do something new; Truffaut's *Tirez Sur le Pianiste* (prix de nouvelle critique), Carbonneau's *Candide* (Prix de l'Humour Noir), Colpi's *Une Aussi Longue Absence* (Prix Louis Delluc) and Jean-Paul Sassy's *Le Peau et Les Os* (Prix Jean Vigo).

Ginette Bill



The new wave rolls on—François Leterrier's "Les Mauvais Coups."



Re-enter the old wave—Jean Delannoy's "La Princesse de Cleves."



The whisky and soda school—Jacques Doniol-Valacroze's "Le Cœur Bat"

where the HOLY SPIRIT leads

1935 Bombardier Billy Wells took a gong to introduce the first film released through General Film Distributors. 'In fulfilment', declared the editor of the *Daily Cinema* last year, 'the reverberation was challenging and triumphant twenty-five years ago it was a promise.'

At least two echoing clangs percolated in piercing Wardour Street's merry shouts of celebration of the silver jubilee of the largest renting company in this country, now called Rank Film Distributors. The loud-coming came in 1958, when an analysis of the Rank Organisation's trading results showed a production and distribution loss of over £1½ million, reducing the Organisation's total profit after taxation to less than £1 million. The ordinary dividend was cut from 12½ per cent to 5 per cent; and the managing director flew to America to receive an 'Honor-of-Industry' award for the first produced accounts brochure of any film company.

Last year Rank turned production distribution losses into a £7,000 profit by making fewer films. With the same cool logic he reduced his exhibition profits higher by closing still more cinemas. In 1956 over 125 Rank cinemas closed, 50 or so are earmarked for closure, and more are certain to follow. 'It will not be too long', said Lord Rank in September, 'before profits from non-cinema interests exceed those from cinema activities.'

It wasn't quite the aim when he stumbled into the industry. 'I came in films because of the Holy Spirit', he has been apt to declare with disconcerting sincerity.

Rank's first business venture with William's Self-Raising Flour is said

to have cost a million of his father's money. He married an heiress, and plodded on with the flour business until his Methodist interests led to him buying film projectors for churches throughout the country and eventually to produce *Mastership*, a religious film which, he claims, converted six Chinese Communists to Christianity. General Film Distributors was born when Rank, now one of the heads of British National Films, found himself unable to find a distributor to take their first production, *Turn of the Tide*. This story of Yorkshire fishermen won third prize at Venice but was considered uncommercial by British distributors. Piqued, Rank bought the Leicester Square Theatre and a few small cinema circuits and while he was about it built Pinewood Studios. This neat solution has since proved so effective that today's 'uncommercial' producers find their chances of distribution far more slender than Rank's ever were.

His control over production, distribution and exhibition grew rapidly in a series of developments which even his ardent biographer, Alan Wood, allows to contain an astonishing degree of luck. A startled article in *Time* in 1947 traced his purchase of 354 Odeon cinemas, 283 Gaumonts and 66 per cent of British studios. Altogether, they reported with awe, he was responsible for 86 movie companies.

Off-shoots included G. B. Kalee, supplying 90 per cent of seats and fittings in British cinemas, Taylor, Taylor and Hobson, responsible for camera and projector lenses, British Acoustic Films, manufacturing projectors and film stock and, with a rare thoroughness, something called the Waste Film Salvage Company. *Time* was worried that Rank might soon turn out a hundred films a

year. In fact the Organization was already in its peak year of 47 films.

Rank, like everyone in the film industry, profited from the boom in cinema attendances during the mid-forties, and the extent of his interests ensured that he prospered more than most. He has never made a secret of his ignorance of the processes of film production and during the golden days left everything to his producers and directors. It was the era of *The Way Ahead*, *Brief Encounter*, *Great Expectations*, *Odd Man Out* and *Henry V*.

At the time David Lean said, 'I doubt if any other group of filmmakers anywhere in the world can claim as much freedom. We of Independent Producers can make any subject we wish, with as much money as we think should be spent upon it. We can cast whatever actors we choose, and we have no interference at all in the way the film is made. No-one sees the films until they are finished, and no cuts are made without the consent of the director or producer, and what's more, none of us is bound by any form of contract... Such are the conditions which have at last given our films a style and nationality of their own.' This seems a more convincing explanation of the peak period of British production than the usual woofle about the stimulation of war and influence of documentary — and it helps explain the ghastly mistake of £1½ million *Caesar and Cleopatra*.

Rank was called a monopolist in the House of Commons and the Board of Trade made a nervous investigation. Lord Brabazon of Tara protested, 'When a man like Rank has engaged to fight American films, he must not be worried with pinpricks.' Bigger troubles were certainly on the way. Declining

post-war attendances led to a loss of almost £1½ million in 1949, not just on production and distribution but on the Organisation's whole activities. And bank loans and overdrafts totalled over 16 million.

By then the old lays of creative freedom had been abandoned. The accounts, led by John Davis, now Rank's managing director and deputy chairman, were in charge. It was Davis who had opposed backing *Henry V*, Davis who said Olivier could have saved £100,000 on *Hamlet* by using the production techniques of *Warning to Wantons*, Davis who supported the independent frame experiments, the notorious charm school, the David Hand cartoon studio, the attempt at establishing a second feature group. Each of these ventures cost the Organisation something like half a million pounds. Economies included the abandoning of Mary Field's unique children's film production unit and the enterprising *This Modern Age* series. Their combined loss was not much more than £100,000 a year.

Davis also provoked the resignation of Del Giudice, swiftly followed by most of Rank's leading producers, directors and executives. Even within the Mayfair offices a tendency to resign whenever promotion pushed the staff within reach of Davis became increasingly obvious. Rank's second expert on what the public wanted is Earl St. John, an ex-cinema manager, who was put in charge of production at Pinewood in 1947. One of his recommendations, the story goes, was that *Genevieve* be put on a shelf and forgotten and that Kenneth More be refused admission to the studio.

In recent years the Organisation blunders have been increasingly spectacular. A refusal to equip their theatres with CinemaScope led to a boycott by Twentieth Century Fox and Rank's humiliating climb-down. *Lawrence of Arabia* was expensively postponed and lost; *A Gentleman's Gentleman*, a half-million musical, was still more expensively abandoned. Davis's own pet production, *Ferry to Hong Kong*, cost half a million and prov-

ed as commercially disastrous as it was artistically bankrupt.

Rank and Davis have always realised that a successful invasion of American cinemas could solve all their problems. (Remember *London Town*?) Davis reconnoitred the country in 1944; Rank followed. An American office opened in 1957. 'We are here to stay', said Davis. A year later *Variety* confessed its mystification that Rank's eighteenth American office had just opened despite their rumoured loss of nearly £10,000 a week. This was at a time when American distributors were all trading warily. As *Variety's* enviable headline put it, 'Rank-Yank Keeps Expanding. Zags While U.S. Distribs Zig.' Eighteen months after opening Rank closed down in America. 'We were not making progress', admitted Davis. The cost of this abortive enterprise has never been disclosed.

The accountants' stranglehold has made Rank something of a refugee from production. Not more than half a dozen films will be produced by the Organisation this year, and Pinewood is being occupied by more and more independent film makers. But the ice is only melting at the source of the river.

It is still the distributor who puts up seventy per cent of the cost of a film. (Twenty per cent comes from the National Film Finance Corporation and ten per cent from the producer.) In other words the subject, script, director and cast of a film must still please the distributor before it can go into production.

This is why the prospect of a British *nouvelle vague* is almost unthinkable. Distributors will not finance the kind of low budget production that looked like revitalising the French industry because, despite all evidence, they believe that only expensive stars, directors and techniques will attract audiences. But judging by the Rank Organisation's lumbering entry into television, discs, ballrooms and bowling alleys, no-one really cares. And Rank is rumoured to be retiring this year.

'I want none of this for myself,' he said once. 'I am in films for my God and my country.' He may yet leave his country without any film industry. If he does, perhaps his God will forgive him.

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